

Memoirs of  
a Little Girl



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BY  
WINIFRED  
JOHNES



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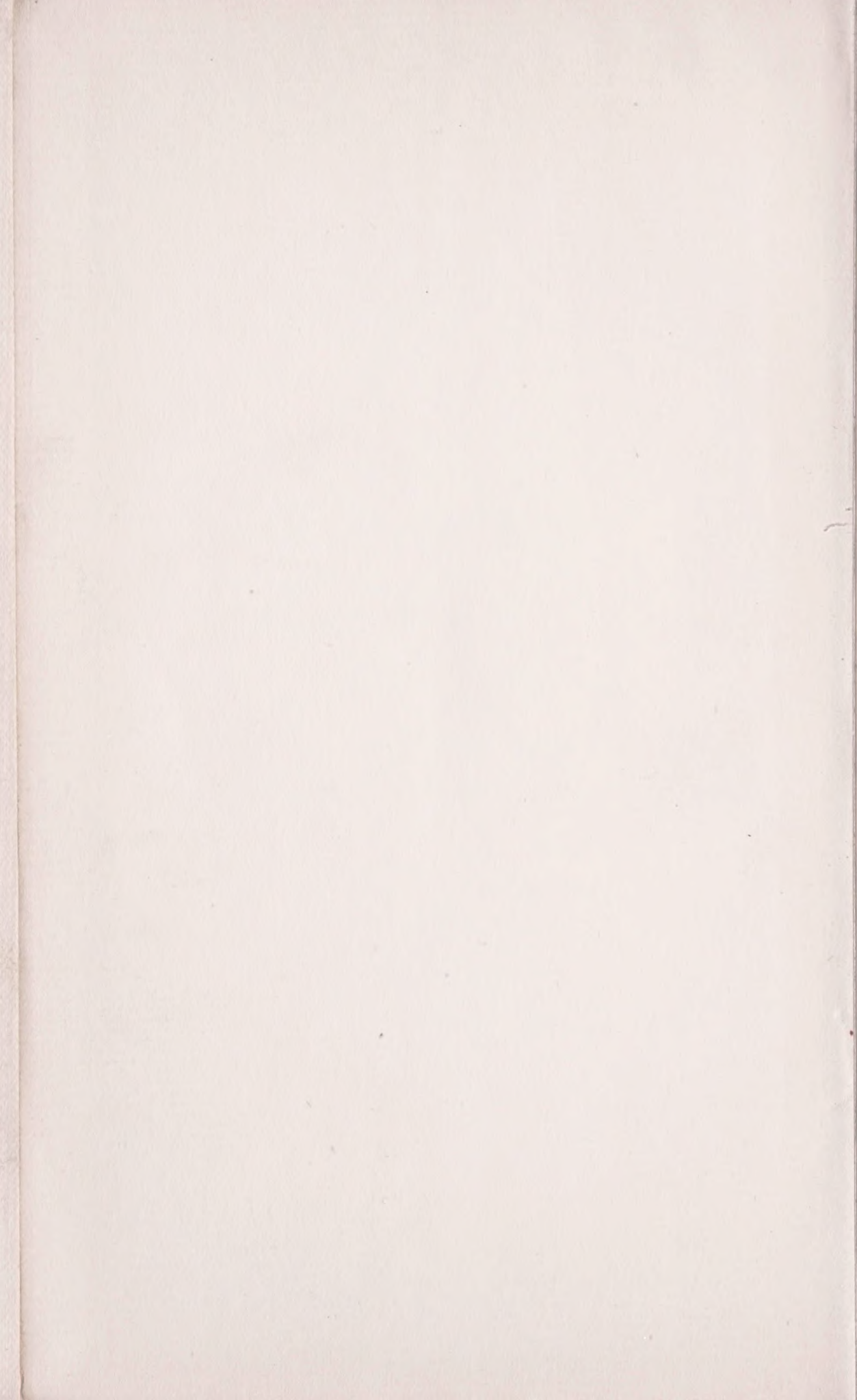
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MEMOIRS OF A LITTLE GIRL.



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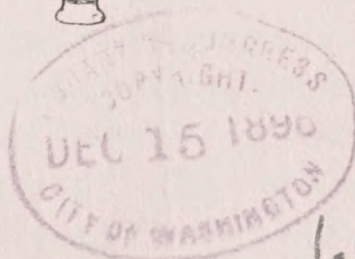
# Memoirs of a Little Girl

BY

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# MEMOIRS OF A LITTLE GIRL.

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## CHAPTER I.

IT is from a day in the midst of the snows of a rigorous Western winter that my first conscious and permanent memory dates. The exterior of my home does not seem at that epoch to have impressed itself upon me, though I recollect it later, a big gray house surrounded by tall locust trees and lilac and snowball bushes, looking cheerful enough under the warm July sunshine.

The first day from which everything else in my world seems to date, I remember as being spent in a large room warmed and almost lighted by the fire that glowed in an immense wood stove. I say lighted, for the fast-falling snow made a ghostly half twilight all day long, through which shone feebly a pale yellow orb that neither heated nor illuminated. The drifting snow nearly covered the lower part of the windows and encrusted itself in patches on the higher



panes. From time to time I left my play near the roaring fire, to press my small nose against the glass and to wonder if by night the white tide would have risen until it mounted to the very roof. I believe that I secretly hoped that it would ; children are eager for sensations new and startling. And then—to the vivid memory of that bright and homely room and the smiling face of my mother as she watched my play, succeeds an absolute blank. Whether the storm cleared or whether it increased, as I hoped it would do, until we were engulfed, I could not now relate from my own recollection. And next, by some strange, miraculous transformation, it was summer and I was romping on the grass with a new baby sister—new only in my memory—for she must have then been six months old. And I pelted her with snowballs from the bush near by, as I must have seen other children pelt their playfellows with real balls of snow in the winter that had past, until the little creature cried with fright and the nursemaid told me that I was too big and rough to play with my little sister.

After that, other memories succeed each other with kaleidoscopic swiftness, some vivid, some vague. There were childish escapades, as when I ran away to join a circus, or to be a feminine Robinson Crusoe on a desert island. Then there was my famous imitation of one of Baron Trenck's many escapes, which ended so disastrously for



me. For some childish peccadillo I had been sent to my room, there to remain until I should be in a penitent frame of mind. This was entirely moral suasion, the only sort my mother practiced. I was not forcibly haled up the stairs and locked in the room ; I was simply told to go there and close the door. I could, therefore, have walked out as easily as I had walked in, but that would not have suited my high and heroic purpose half so well as to make a bold and daring escape by way of the window. So I hastily tore my little bed open and hastily—alas ! too hastily, knotted the two sheets together and, after fastening the rope thus made to one of the legs of the bed, I swung myself gallantly and fearlessly out of the window. There followed for one second a glorious soaring sensation that made me catch my breath—then nothing more until I recovered my senses and found myself supported on my mother's knees, with grave and anxious faces all about me and a dreadful pain shooting through my right arm. My knots had not been very well secured and the improvised rope had parted in the middle just as it crossed the window ledge.

Under such circumstances, Baron Trenck would doubtless have picked himself up and gone on his way rejoicing that he had only broken his arm and not his neck. I, however, was forced to admit to myself that a small girl of six, if no less fearless than a war-scarred veteran, is fear-



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less because she does not realize the probable consequences of her foolhardy deeds rather than because she is careless of them.

My broken arm gave me a certain degree of satisfaction when I made my first appearance among my playfellows with it done up in a sling, for I could pose as a heroine who had suffered for her daring and who proudly bore her honorable scars; but the novelty soon wore off and, as the arm did not mend very fast, I found it a serious drawback to my active amusements.

Then there was a never-to-be-forgotten trip to a lumber camp, taken one spring with my father, the owner of a large sawmill on the Fox River. The roads were very bad, as the frost had only recently relaxed the hold in which it locks so fast the earth in that cold region. It was necessary, therefore, to make the trip on horseback, I riding astride in front of my father. The wild scene made an ineffaceable impression on my mind—the large clearing surrounded by a lofty and almost impenetrable forest, the rude log huts and the red-shirted lumbermen, a rough and boisterous crew, ready with knife or pistol on small provocation.

They were very gentle with me, however, and their harsh voices took on ingratiating inflections as they talked to the “little lady.” One of them was rather a skillful taxidermist, and he insisted on presenting me with a gopher which he had



stuffed. It was one of my most cherished treasures, until a small puppy, a newer acquisition, chewed it up beyond all hope of repair. Through my sobs I told my mother that I supposed I'd have to forgive the dog for he didn't know any better, but that I never wished to see him again. I relented the next day, however, not so much from a Christian spirit of forgiveness as because I didn't care to lose at once my two dearest treasures. So Prince was gradually restored to a favor which lasted until his untimely taking off through distemper. This, my first great sorrow was, like the Irishman's, somewhat assuaged by giving my departed friend a "most iligant funeral." Indeed, the obsequies were so satisfactory to all the participants, that we thought seriously of exhuming the corpse and repeating the ceremonies on the following day. My mother overheard some conversation bearing on the subject, however, and so decisively forbade the carrying out of our plan that we were forced to regard our canine friend as being as dead as Cæsar, and all our subsequent consolation was derived from composing an elaborate epitaph to adorn the monument which, by dint of carefully saving our pennies, we intended to purchase.

Needless to say that the composition never was chiseled into stone, for, by the next week, other things began to interest us. We could not forever mourn, and candy and marbles were expensive.



## CHAPTER II.

THE summer which followed my visit to the logging camp, left its impress on my mind as being a very eventful one. At least, it was full of novel experiences and afforded glimpses of a phase of life that was to me wholly new. In the first place, our family, which had always occupied our own house, moved to a hotel, and it was there that I made my first acquaintance with the theatre, both before and behind the scenes.

My brother, who was many years older than I, had elected, a year previous to this time, to do as so many ambitious boys have done—go out into the world and seek his fortune. He had taken a position in a Chicago business house. His visits home were rare, and brief in their duration, and so, only my little sister Kitty and I were left with our parents in the big house behind the snowball bushes and lilac trees. When an enterprising Yankee, full of modern ideas and fresh from the center of Eastern civilization, built a smart and showy new hotel, throwing completely into the shade the old *California House*, my father took a suite of rooms for us there, and the home of my earliest recollections was abandoned.



The top floor of the *National Hotel* was constructed into a large hall, with a stage at one end. Not long after its completion, Lepère was visited by a travelling theatrical company. It was called the J. C. Blodgett Co., I think—the name of its star actor. The gifted beings who played Shakespeare by night were entirely affable and condescending by day. Lady Macbeth always asked kindly, in her deep tragedy tones, “How do you do, little girl?” when she met me in the corridor, and Hamlet was a very approachable person. The one whom I most admired, however, was a plump young woman with short blonde curls, who was always cast for the part of a page, and who occasionally did a song and dance before the curtain to allay the impatience of the waiting audience. My childish heart was won by her merry smile and gay, good-humored ways. I began secretly to aspire to be an actress, just like Miss Ethel St. John.

My delight knew no bounds when I was called upon to help the company out of difficulty. Mr. Blodgett (by request), so the programme stated, was to play Rip Van Winkle. His little son took the part of Rip’s boy, and there was no other child in the company to play “Mina” in the first act. My size and age—I was eight years old—fitted me to walk through the one scene, and my mother’s objections gave way be-



fore Mr. Blodgett's supplications and my own eagerness.

I had only one rehearsal to prepare me for my first appearance in public, as they did not think it necessary that I should learn the words of the part. I was to be an animated dummy—nothing more—but secretly I cherished high hopes of so distinguishing myself that the company would insist on my being enrolled as a regular member. I was quite prepared to run away, did my parents refuse their permission. Alas! I had never heard of stage fright, but by bitter experience I learned its meaning and my ambitious aspirations came to naught.

Probably Mr. Blodgett's "Rip" was far below Jefferson's standard, but it satisfied and moved his audience that night. When it came time for me to appear, the strangest feelings began to assail me; my tongue grew dry and my knees became weak and unsteady. I went on the stage helping the little boy to carry a basket;—of clothes—I think. When we set it down, I stood stock-still, struggling with a wild desire to run away and hide myself from all those staring eyes that seemed so mercilessly fixed on me. My little stage-brother went through his lines with ease and confidence which seemed little short of miraculous to me.

"Come here, Mina," he said, seating himself by the table.



I did not move. I could not, I was perfectly paralyzed with fear. The boy scowled at me and beckoned. "Come here, Mina, I want to tell you something," he repeated. "Come along you little goose, or I'll throw something at you," he whispered shrilly.

This was too much. I recovered my power of locomotion and fled, weeping, overturning the basket of clothes in my effort to escape, by the shortest cut, into the obscurity of a private life. How Mr. Blodgett finished the act, I don't know, for I was too mortified to creep out that evening from the hiding-place I had sought. It is probable that he was a little careful the next time he selected an amateur to help him.

My small companions teased me unmercifully, as children will, and my discomfiture was so great that for a few days I preferred to play alone rather than run the risk of hearing anything about Rip Van Winkle. It was a tax on my ingenuity to amuse myself without any playmates, particularly as my mother had forbidden me to go near the river whose brink was so invitingly near the hotel, being at the foot of a gentle slope some forty yards from the back of the building, or to play in the ice-houses, most fascinating places which were built along the river's edge. So, at my wit's end for amusement, I started to imitate some of the adventures of a certain "Tiny Pig," an imaginary being who seemed to be quite as



clever as "Brer Rabbit" or "Reineke Fuchs," judging from the exploits I used to hear my little sister's nurse relating to her. At one point in his career he made his escape from his enemies, so ran the chronicle, by getting into a barrel and rolling down hill, far faster than they could run. The hill was there; so was the barrel. What fun it would be to try it! Of course I didn't care to keep on my way until I rolled into the river, so I chose a spot where a conveniently placed woodshed would stop the barrel before it reached the brink. I had not then read of the tortures of Regulus at the hands of the Carthaginians, or I might have more carefully examined the sides of the barrel before venturing to make a descent in it. Chuckling to myself, entirely confident of the result of my exploit, I crawled in and started the barrel. It rolled on, gently at first, then faster and faster, until I seemed to lose all consciousness. At length, with what seemed terrible force, it struck the side of the woodshed and poor "Tiny Pig" crawled out, battered and bruised, lacerated and bleeding from the sharp nails which protruded through the barrel's sides.

My first thought was to wonder whether anyone had seen my hasty and undignified descent. I peered anxiously about. No one was in sight. The back windows of the hotel stared back blankly, empty of spectators. I heaved a sigh of relief and set to work to repair, as well as I could.



the disorder of my appearance. It was many years before I told any one of my attempt to give a practical demonstration of the romantic achievements of "Tiny Pig."

I soon forgot both my misadventures, and the other children forgot to tease me, in the absorbingly interesting topic which occupied everybody's attention at that time. People were always getting drowned in Lepère. It seemed almost as though the Fox River ran through the town for the double purpose of carrying down logs to the mills, and of drowning off the superfluous population. The river had lately claimed its prey in the shape of a worthless vagabond, the town drunkard, known as "Old" Jim O'Brien. Jim was not very old, and, barring his excesses in the way of drink, was a healthy enough specimen of manhood. The town buried him; the town shed no tears over his untimely taking-off and would promptly have forgotten him, if it hadn't occurred to some one that his coffin had seemed a good deal heavier than it ought to have been. People talked for two or three days, and finally, the rumors grew to such an extent that the grave was examined. Sure enough—instead of burying "Old" Jim, they had buried a pine log.

The news spread like wildfire. Who had taken the body and where had it been hidden? Nobody knew, but everybody suspected, at first, Dr. Risk, a young physician, living at the National



Hotel, and his friend, a druggist on the nearest corner, who dabbled in medicine, under the doctor's tutelage. But Dr. Risk talked so indignantly of the outrage, of the horror of grave desecrating, that suspicion passed him by.

We children listened and shivered. We had never feared "Old Jim" alive, even in his cups. We were wofully afraid of him, now that he was dead. We suspected every empty room, every dark corner, of being Jim's hiding-place. It was said that his body was hidden in one of the ice-houses, that it was buried beneath sawdust near the riverside, that it was in this man's cellar or that man's attic. Willie Miller, Fannie Burt, little Louise Tétreau and I pressed closer together as we talked in fearful whispers of the gruesome thing.

Willie said scornfully "Who's afraid of 'Old Jim?' I ain't." But later in the evening, when it came time for him to go home, he begged us girls to walk there with him. It was a few rods away, on the same street as the hotel.

"I'll teach you to row my boat to-morrow if you will," said Willie persuasively to me. "Mebbe we'll catch some fish. I've got a real hook and there's lots of worms in our back yard, only ma said I wasn't to dig it up any more. But I guess she'll let me get a few," he added hopefully. "Come on, Bess, don't be a 'fraid cat."



"You're the 'fraid cat," I retorted. "You're afraid to walk home 'cause it's dark. I'm not afraid—I just don't feel like walking." I demonstrated my weariness by sitting down on the stairs and leaning my head against the bannister rail.

"Oh, pshaw, Bess ! I didn't mean that, really. Our cat has got six kittens, and ma said I could give some of 'em away. I thought mebbe you'd like to pick out one."

At the mention of kittens I jumped up with alacrity. I adored the soft, fluffy, cuddling things, but they always would insist on growing up into dignified and sleepy cats, no longer interesting, so that a new kitten was a gift not to be despised. I forgot our bugbear until we stepped out into the street, when Fannie Burt whispered in my ear—"Supposin' 'Old Jim' should reach out from under the sidewalk and grab your foot !" Overcome by the horror of the very probable picture she had called up, she turned and fled back into the house, little Louise Tétreau shrieking at her heels. I stood my ground stoutly, although chills were chasing each other down my back.

"I forgot," I remarked, with elaborate carelessness, "but my mother said last time that I brought a kitten home that I wasn't to bring any more for ever and ever so long. I'll ask her tomorrow if I can't have one, though," I added, fearing to lose the coveted prize.



Willie was at his wit's end. He hung about disconsolately, feeling that he had exhausted his resources but unwilling to give up, and tread that dark path alone. Suddenly he brightened. "There's our hired girl and her beau. Good night, Bess. Hold on, Mary—wait for me," he shouted, darting after the pair, who were just then passing the hotel. He was probably an unwelcome addition to their party of two, and doubtless shortened their leavetaking at the back-gate, but Willie was not sensitive, and was perfectly satisfied to make his way home under escort of any sort.



### CHAPTER III.

THE little town wore an air of subdued and mysterious excitement the next morning. Before I had breakfasted, Willie Miller was shouting under our windows for me to come out. I thought of the kitten, and completed my toilet hastily. Willie was waiting outside.

"Say," he exclaimed, bursting with eagerness, "they've found him !"

"Found him !" I repeated stupidly. "What ? 'Old Jim'—really ? Where was he ?"

"In Dr. Denison's drug-store cellar. He's in there now, and Dr. Denison and Dr. Risk put him there. The Irish Catholics are going to lynch 'em. They're hunting for them now. Hooray, lets go and see the fun !"

Willie gave vent to his feelings by letting out a terrific Indian war-whoop and kicking up his heels a little, as he started to run down the street. He had wasted all the time he could afford, and was off to hang on to the outskirts of the mob. For a mob there was. I could see a crowd coming down the street. In front of them, bareheaded and walking backwards, was a man whom I recognized as Judge Jewett. I could not hear



what he was saying, but by his gestures I saw that he was attempting to pacify them. One of the men was carrying a rope, which he flourished in the air; two others bore a ladder between them. "String 'em up!" I heard some one shout.

I realized the situation. The hotel was almost deserted, for every one was out hearing the news, or forming the throng which surrounded Denison's drug-store. What if Dr. Risk were in his room? The mob were evidently coming to look for him there.

I darted into the hall and down the stairway, and, with a mighty effort, pushed the heavy door to and shot the bolt. I flew breathlessly up two flights of stairs. I wasn't particularly fond of Dr. Risk—his was not an attractive personality—but I did not wish him to be hanged. I knocked at his door with eager, trembling hands. "Who's there?" a voice inquired.

"It's me, Dr. Risk—Bessie Benton. They're coming to hang you. Run—hide—quick!"

The door opened, and the doctor, pale and agitated, caught me by the wrist. "What's that you say?" he asked.

"They've found out—old Jim O'Brien. The Catholics—they're going to lynch you," I stammered. "Oh, *quick!*"

"If you're deceiving me, Bessie——" The doctor gave me an ugly look, but did not finish.



Sounds from below made him turn even more ghastly. They were trying to force the hall door. Some one shouted, "Go through the bar."

"For heaven's sake, Bessie, what shall I do?" gasped the frightened man.

"In my room—come. They won't know you're there." I half dragged him down the stairs, one flight, to my own room. It was just as I had left it, a few minutes before. My little sister, a picture of innocent, cherubic loveliness, lay, still fast asleep, in the bed.

"Get under the bed—be quick! 'Way under—I can see you." I dragged off a part of the covering, so that it hung down and concealed his form. None too soon. I went out into the hall and closed the door after me as the mob reached the head of the stairs. Judge Jewett, his coat half torn from his shoulders, was still trying to hold them back, and with him was my father, trying too, with all his might, to check their progress. I ran, with a frightened sob in my throat, to my father's side.

"What are you doing here, Bessie?" he asked sternly. "Go into your room and lock the door."

As I obeyed him, the mob rushed on. They were in the third story. With a howl of rage they flung open the room whence their prey had escaped. "We'll find him yet. He's here!"



some one of them cried. I could hear them opening, or forcing, the doors of the rooms above (it was the uppermost story except one—the theatre). Then they came back to the second floor. I heard my father cry: "Men, men, have you no shame? This is my wife's room!" Still the search went on. They were hammering at my door. My mother, half fainting, and partially dressed, came through the door that opened from her room into mine.

"Open and have it over," she exclaimed. "You can see that there is no one here."

"Have either of you seen that body-snatcher?" asked one of the leaders.

My little sister awoke and sat up in bed rubbing her eyes. Seeing the rough, strange men about, she commenced to cry. My mother snatched her up and began to soothe the frightened child.

"I've just got up," I said calmly. It seemed as though they must hear the loud thumping of my heart. "I haven't been to breakfast yet! Who are you looking for?"

"You can see for yourselves," exclaimed my father indignantly. "I know your names. I know *you*, McManus, and *you*, Gallagher. You shall answer for this outrage."

A little humbled, a trifle cooled down, they pressed on, out of the room. Needless to say, they did not find the doctor, who, secreted in an-



other room of the hotel until nightfall, was driven under cover of darkness to the nearest town, five miles away. He went by rail from there to Chicago, for a change of scene, and it was some time before he ventured to show himself in Lepére again. When he did, the hot-blooded, impulsive, lawless fellows who had led the outbreak against him, had almost forgotten Jim O'Brien.

It leaked out gradually what my part in the affair had been, and, greatly to my surprise and relief, the Irish Catholics showed no desire to hang me in place of Dr. Risk. Willie Miller, however, remarked that girls always spoiled everything. "You might have let them get him and give him a scare," he said to me. "Some one would 'a cut him down before he choked to death. I never saw a hanging, and I wanted to see one."

It is probable that the doctor did not share Willie's optimistic view of the situation.



## CHAPTER IV.

"COME on, Bess, I've got something to show you." Willie Miller had evidently become possessed of a treasure. His face was shining with delight and excitement. I was anxious to please him, for I had felt keenly his strictures on my interference in behalf of Dr. Risk, so I followed meekly when he beckoned. At a safe distance from the house, he showed me the contents of the little package he was carrying, five neatly-rolled cigars and a dozen or so of matches. "I'm going to smoke 'em," he said. "Come on down to the boat-house and see me. I got 'em all for a nickel."

"Oh, Willie, do you know how? Mamma said I must never go down to the boat-house, though."

"Oh, come along. It ain't going to drown you just to go into the boat-house and see me smoke."

I had scruples, however, and Willie finally compromised on a secluded corner of the big hotel woodshed, against which "Tiny Pig" had come to a full stop. I watched for a time, with reverential awe, then a desire to emulate his prowess began to take possession of me.

"Let me smoke one, Willie," I pleaded.



"Girls don't smoke," replied the young autocrat, conscious of the superiority of years and sex. He was three years my senior.

"I read that Cuban ladies smoke cigars, just like the men. Just let me try. Let's pretend I'm a Cuban. Old Irishwomen smoke, too. I've seen 'em."

"Well, anyhow, the young ones don't, and the old women only smoke pipes. But I've got more'n I'll want here to-day, I guess, and you can try one."

A half an hour later, I left Willie curled up in a dark corner of the wood-house. He seemed very wretched indeed, so wretched that I should have hesitated to leave him alone, had he not shown every evidence of a desire to get rid of me, and had I not begun to feel a similar need for solitude. I was dreadfully ill. It seemed, at times, that I was about to die, and my sole consolation in my agonies was that I had not disobeyed my mother and gone to the boat-house. Perhaps I stood some chance of going to heaven. I should have liked to kiss them all good-bye, I thought, but I hadn't time. I hadn't time for anything.

I had hidden away in an empty room of the hotel, and it was dark before I finally crawled out of my retirement. For me, time was no more. I realized that the supper hour must long have been past, but I didn't care for that. My



appetite seemed permanently lost. As I wandered unsteadily in the direction of my room, I thought of Willie's probable fate. He had smoked two cigars, or nearly two, I less than one. He was undoubtedly dead. No constitution could stand such a strain. I began to cry. Willie had his faults. He was inclined to be overbearing and to put on superior airs. He was not always truthful, but we had been friends. I wished that I had walked home with him that night when we were all so afraid of "Old Jim." I might have been kinder and more sympathetic that afternoon, too. I might have stayed with him and held his head. Here I shuddered retrospectively.

As I entered my door, I ran into Nora, our Irish nurse. She gave a howl that nearly shattered my already weakened nerves.

"Bessie Benton, you bad girl! Where've you been? And they dhraggin' the river for you this blessed minute, and yer poor mother in fits in her room. Don't ye go in there, now"—barring my path. "The docthor has given her some 'orphine, and put the poor lady to slape. Oh, ye bad child!"

"I've been out walking, Nora. I couldn't get home any sooner," I replied, with some dignity. "Are they really dragging the river?" I felt a thrill of importance at the idea.

"Coorse they are. See the lights down there."



She pointed out of the window. Lanterns twinkled fitfully along the river's edge, their reflection broken and multiplied in the swift flowing stream. I could hear the men shouting hoarse commands to each other. I had often before seen the same sight, when the cruel river claimed its prey, but I had never felt such a personal interest in the search. It was like assisting at one's own funeral. And down among the crowd that watched the grim work going on, was Willie Miller, apparently as lively as ever. I experienced a sudden revulsion of feeling. I never wanted to look at that boy again. He faithfully kept our common secret, however, perhaps quite as much on his own account as on mine, and I owed him some measure of gratitude for that.

My somewhat vague accounts of where and how I had spent the afternoon were received with a credulity that filled me with shame and remorse. My mother and father were so overjoyed by my safe return that they were not disposed to press me for a circumstantial account of my doings on that day. I was treated with consideration of which I felt myself so entirely unworthy that I determined then and there to be a better girl.

This resolve of mine was further strengthened by some peculiar appearances in the sky which began about that time to manifest themselves. The ignorant and superstitious servants whispered to each other and to us children that the



red glare which nightly illumined the heavens was a certain sign of the approaching end of the world. I am not sure that this notion was entirely confined to them, either. Crowds of people assembled nightly in the streets, gazing at the lurid skies, advancing all sorts of theories as to their cause. One man pretended to have made out the shape of a flaming sword ; another, that of a cross, pointing directly downward. Revival meetings began to be held by a few excited Millerites, and the camp meeting in progress near our town had a large attendance.

My customary morning and evening prayers seemed totally inadequate to such a state of affairs, and I made frequent extemporized petitions for mercy and forgiveness, almost suffocating myself in the attempt to say them in the little clothes-press of my room. I took the Bible literally in those days, and remembered the admonition to go into one's closet and close the door before offering up prayers.

Gradually, however, the roseate heavens paled to their wonted color—the clear, brilliant blue of the western skies against which the stars seem twice magnified,—and gradually our terrors became appeased. The Millerites put away their ascension robes, the camp-meeting closed. School bells began to ring, as the first touch of autumnal crispness revived the air. I stopped praying in my closet. There was no time for



that now, and besides, I argued, it wasn't necessary any more. Evidently the old world had decided to swing around its orbit for an indefinite period. My unnatural meekness and amiability vanished, and I was once more the little tomboy of former days.



## CHAPTER V.

THE Tétreaus were French Canadians who lived not very far from the National Hotel and very close to the river, Little Louise, my sometime playmate, was the youngest of the family, and this was her first year at school, She was two years younger than I, and I was somewhat inclined to patronize and occasionally to snub her, but, being such near neighbors, we often walked together to school. She found the confinement of school irksome, and was often a truant. We did not have kindergartens in those days, at least, not out in Wisconsin. School-work consisted of tasks, not of amusements, even for little six-year olds like Louise.

One morning, late in September, she did not run out to join me, as usual, and I felt no surprise when I saw her place vacant at school. Probably I thought nothing at all about it. At roll call in the afternoon she was still absent. Miss Briggs paused a moment after her name, and looked up at the little vacant desk, then went on without comment, At two o'clock, when the entire school was engaged in a big



spelling-match, Louise's eldest sister, Léonie, came into the school-room, She was pale and out of breath. She had evidently been walking very fast. There was a hasty, whispered conversation between her and Miss Briggs. Then the school-mistress asked in her clear, precise tones, "Children, have any of you seen Louise Tétreau to-day?"

The silence was oppressive; not one of us, I fancy, but thought of the river, the cruel devourer of so many lives. At length, Miss Briggs gave Léonie an expressive glance. The girl burst into tears, and, with her handkerchief pressed to her eyes left the room.

When I reached home that afternoon they had already begun to drag the river. Louise's hat and a little tin pail that she played with had been found on the brink at noon. A log floating in the water was close to the shore—so easy to mistake for a sure foothold. Madame Tétreau, wringing her hands and sobbing, was walking up and down the bank. They could not persuade her to leave the river-side, and there she stayed the rest of the day, a tragic figure, in whose presence the idly curious shrank back awestruck,

I did not sleep well that night, From my fitful slumber I awoke many times, to hear the clanking of the boat-hooks and chains, the gruff voices of the searchers. At daybreak the little



cannon began to boom, with a heavy, ominous jar that shook the house.

I did not go to school that day. I don't think that anyone did, for I saw Miss Briggs on the bridge later in the morning. Everyone was searching for chubby, laughing little Louise. Some were pretending to look for her in other places, but, in our hearts, we all knew that she was in the river. We all came back to that. After a while they dragged the cannon away. It was too soon, some one said. They would try it again next day.

Late in the afternoon I stood among the crowd on the drawbridge, my hand fast clasped in my mother's. I shall never forget that sight. The crowded bridge, full of people that we knew, the boats thick around it, the lowering sky, and on the bank the mournful figure of the distracted mother. A young man whom we all knew came slowly out of the Tétreau's house, dressed in swimming tights. He was going to dive for the body, they said. As he paused a moment on the bridge, poised for the dive, a murmur ran through the crowd. One of the grappling hooks had caught in something. The young man drew back while they brought the burden slowly to the surface. I heard Madame Tétreau's wild shriek, as my mother led me quickly away, and I clung to her side, sobbing.

I never liked the river after that—never longed



to play on the banks as I had so often wished to do. Soon it froze over, and then it seemed to lose its sinister look in some degree. It was covered with skaters. One could drive for miles on the ice in perfect security. The monster was sleeping, surfeited with the blood of its innocent victims, but I knew it would waken again in the spring, eager for fresh sacrifices, and so I was not sorry that never again was I to sport in its waves, or to see it dimpling in the sunshine when I looked from my window.

When summer came again we were about to leave Lepère. The winter had brought many changes.

My father had embarked in some new enterprise which was to make him a large fortune. I used to hear it talked of, and of how we were to return with our riches to the East, for which my parents had never ceased to be homesick. Instead of gaining wealth, however, my father lost the modest fortune which had made our lives pleasant and easy, if not splendid. The big gray house behind the lilac trees was sold, and with it a great deal of our furniture. The remainder was packed and stored.

My grandparents, who lived on a farm in the northern part of the state, sent for us to spend the summer with them, for it now became necessary to count the cost of living. My father went to Missouri, hoping to find some business open-



ing there, and my poor mother, with her two little ones, started on her journey northward. It must have been a sad trip for her—her soft, brown eyes were often reddened and swollen from nights of weeping,—but to my sister and me it was full of novelty and excitement. Certainly it did not lack anything in variety.

We started from Lepère by rail and spent the first night away from home at a town which was the railroad terminus. Early the next morning we embarked on a small steamer to make the second stage of our journey. This was the most fascinating part of it. It was the Fox River on whose bosom we were floating along, but these smiling shores, thickly wooded almost to the water's edge, this gently winding stream, seemed very different from the busy slave that turned its strength to do so many tasks, and, in turn exacted such a forfeit of human life from the town whose bread it gained. Along these banks was no busy hum of mills—the only sound that broke the stillness was the puffing of our engine and the splash of our paddle-wheels.

This charming experience came to an end all too soon, and, at a lonely landing—nothing but a rude pier with a small log-house at the end—we disembarked. There awaited us an old-fashioned stage-coach, drawn by four horses, into whose stifling interior we were packed with the other passengers. Then began the roughest



ride I ever experienced. The road, mostly corduroy—that is, of unhewn logs laid crosswise close together—led through a dense forest, and, in places, through swamps so deep that even the corduroy had sunk nearly out of sight. Occasionally the coach would become hopelessly stuck and we would all have to alight. There was no roadside where we could stand. The men had to carry us back or forward a little distance and leave us in the middle of the road until they could extricate the clumsy vehicle and go on again. Then they would climb back inside, their high boots plastered almost to the knee with black mud or sticky red clay. The violent swaying and lurching of the coach soon made the women and children ill. I don't think that I ever experienced a worse attack of seasickness. Limp and exhausted we finally reached Milford, just at sunset, and at my uncle's home there we spent the second night of our journey.



## CHAPTER VI.

WHAT a glorious summer followed ! There were no tramps in that inaccessible region—farm-houses were too far apart and the walking was too bad—so I was allowed to roam about pretty freely, and I made the most of those long summer days.

The next morning after our arrival in Milford we left for my grandfather's farm, six miles distant. Grandfather Boyce drove my mother and my little sister out there in his buggy. I followed with his man Jonas, and the trunks, drawn by a slow and dignified ox-team. Horses were not plentiful there, and all the heavy work was done by oxen. We arrived at the farm long after the others, and, to my regret, the sun went down before I had a chance to explore half of that region of new delights. I went to sleep with the mournful note of the whippoorwill sounding in my ears and dreamed all night of cows and chickens, of fish of colossal size and birds in whose nests were found eggs like jewels. I awoke in the rosy dawn after a terrific struggle with a great, green, luminous-eyed frog, to find



my grandmother's big Maltese cat sitting on my chest and purring contentedly. Under ordinary circumstances I should have welcomed such a visitor and have stopped to play with her, but, through the cool, fresh air rang sounds that told me that the world was awaking and I sprang from my bed, eager to be present at the milking. Jonas was singing, in a mellow, pleasant voice, something which always took the place of a milking song with him. I could hear his expostulatory "So boss, so there!" and the clattering of the milk pails. Hastily dressing myself I slipped down the stairs and out to the cow-yard. Jonas was already at work, assisted by the young woman, a neighboring farmer's daughter, who "aided in the housework"—such was her description of her position. Jonas and Luella had some sort of a permanent flirtation going on between them all summer, probably because the neighborhood was so thinly settled that they were forced to find most of their amusement within the limits of the farm. They were alternately quarrelling and chaffing when I made my appearance. The placid-faced cows looked at me in mild astonishment. This small capering person was something new to them and old "Mooly," who had a crooked horn, kicked out a little as I passed her, nearly upsetting Jonas. "Dern ye," he shouted, slapping the refractory cow's flank, "Hold still thar, will ye?" I drank a glass of



the fresh milk, warm and foaming from the pail, and begged Jonas to call me early the next morning and let me assist with the milking, instead of Luella. That young woman got up with alacrity from her milking-stool and invited me to take her place at once. I was somewhat mystified by her willingness to give up so fascinating an occupation, and still further astonished by my inability to press out one drop of milk into the pail. Jonas's loud guffaw and Luella's shrill cackle at my amazement made me put forth all my strength, but without result. I rose, somewhat disconcerted, and Luella resumed her place, remarking dryly that "there was a few things city folks didn't know."

I felt hurt, for I was conscious only of admiration and of a desire to emulate all that I saw, even to Luella's somewhat remarkable style of hairdressing ; it was so original, I thought. Nig, my grandfather's big black dog, came frisking about just then, in his overgrown puppy fashion.

He seemed glad to make my acquaintance, and, unlike Luella and the cows, showed no evidence of a desire to humiliate me, or to think any the less of me, because I had been born and bred in a town. We engaged in a lively romp which lasted until the breakfast-bell recalled us to an idea of time and of duties to be performed. It was a summons that Nig seemed to understand quite as well as I, for he started pell-mell for the



house as soon as it began to sound. The cats were all there, too, ahead of us. Their manner was less eager and more dignified, but their interest was no less deep. Grandpa, a very small eater himself, always fed them with scraps from time to time during the progress of the meal. My grandmother, who had a very keen sense of propriety, invariably said that the cats and the dog must go, that she would not permit their presence in the dining-room at another meal. Having said this, she appeared to think her duty was done and she took no more notice of the animals until their next appearance in the dining-room, when she would again say the same thing. At first I took her very literally and used to put in a plea that they might be allowed to stay, but after a while I grew to understand my grandmother's peculiarities so well that I wisely held my peace. She was a very sweet and kindly old lady, whose natural gentleness was somewhat marred by what seemed to me then an abnormal sense of duty. "Spare the rod and spoil the child," "Pride goeth before a fall," "Beauty is but skin deep," "Handsome is that handsome does," and a host of other proverbs of a similar tone were household words with her, and were unpleasantly suggestive to my childish ears. My grandfather was better fun. He was so sympathetic and so genial. His stock of fairy-tales and stories of adventure seemed inexhaustible, and he knew how



to make with his hands, the most amusing shadow pictures on the wall. He extemporized on any subject delightful doggerel verses which seemed to me quite as good poetry as I had ever heard anywhere. I trotted after him as he went about the farm, perfectly enchanted with his society. But grandpa had his hours of rest, which, from my standpoint, took up far too much of the day. Kitty was too young to be an available companion for my more serious expeditions. When I took up the little fishing-rod my grandfather had fashioned for me and started for the creek that ran through a portion of the farm about an eighth of a mile from the house, my mother usually called to me to take Nig along. Nig was always glad to go, but he had too many ideas of the resources of these woods through which our road lay. He almost invariably branched off from the main path and, before long, I would hear him at a distance, barking in a high, excited key that told me he had run to earth some small game. Sometimes he rejoined me, as I sat fishing from the little bridge, tired and overheated, his nose and paws covered with the soil in which he had been burrowing for a woodchuck or a gopher, but oftenest he went home without troubling himself further about me. I took his desertion quite philosophically for I was afraid of nothing, and the fishing, which was excellent, kept me from getting dull or lonely.



One afternoon, as I sat on the bridge alone, and the sun's rays were beginning to fall aslant, I heard a step strike on the planks at the other end. Looking up, I saw a slender dusty figure approaching me with uncertain step. A country wagon occasionally had passed me, as I sat thus engaged, but this was the first foot-passenger I had ever seen crossing the bridge, and I eyed the young man with interest. He glanced at my little string of fish with an eager look, and asked me in a weak voice, with a certain shrinking in his manner, if the fishing were good. Just then I pulled up a particularly plump and lively perch which I proudly held up as an evidence that it was. His large hollow eyes grew bright.

"Let me take him off for you," he said, seizing the line. I noticed how his hand trembled and could not help thinking that I could have got the fish off more quickly myself. He ran his fingers along the plump sides of the struggling fish, as I again threw back my line into the water.

"They must be very nice to eat," he said.

"They're awfully good," I replied affably, won by the stranger's interest. "You just ought to taste one that my grandma has fried. But it's more fun to catch them than to eat them, I think." I struggled for a moment with two conflicting emotions : hospitality to the stranger triumphed and I handed over the rod to him. "Wouldn't you like to catch one and just see what fun it is?"



He seized the rod eagerly. "Oh, thank you, you're very good," he said, throwing out the bait with tremulous hands.

"That's not the way," I said. "You're dragging it. They'll never bite that. Just hold it up—so—just a teeny bit away from the bottom."

"Thank you," he replied, steadying the rod and holding it as I indicated. His manners really seemed very nice. I looked at him closely. He would have been quite good-looking, if he were not so thin and so ill, I thought.

"Have you been sick?" I asked sympathetically. "Wouldn't you like to rest awhile at my grandpapa's, up the road a little way?"

He looked down at his dusty shoes and stained and ragged clothing. "Oh, no, thank you. You're very good, but you see I'm in walking trim. I really don't look fit to go into any one's house."

"There!" I cried, jumping up excitedly. "You've got a bite! It's a big one. Pull him in."

He was so slow and so unhandy that the fish escaped. He seemed disappointed and asked me if he might not try again. I assented readily enough and once more he threw out the line.

"Is it very far from here to Milford?" he inquired, after we had watched the line for a few minutes in silence.



"About six miles by the road, but I've heard that there was a little shorter cut. Are you going there? My Uncle Henry and his wife live in Milford."

"Yes, I started for there this morning. I thought, perhaps, I could get there before sun-down."

"Well, I don't believe you will—there's lots of hills on the way. There—pull! No, you've lost him again. You ought to pay more attention," I added a little severely.

The young man smiled and looked at me apologetically. He certainly was rather nice looking, and his teeth were beautiful. "I'm not used to this kind of fishing, you see. I've always fished in a great lake, where the fish were very large. I hardly notice these little fellows when they bite."

"Well you'd notice if a big sunfish got hold. They 'most pull the rod out of my hands sometimes. If mamma would let me have a real hook, I could catch a large fish—I know there are some here, for they steal my bait and get away and the pin straightens right out—but mamma is afraid I'd get it in my fingers. I wouldn't though, but mothers are always afraid of everything—'fraid you'll get drowned, or run over, or carried off, or you'll fall, or a dog'll bite you or—*something*, all the time."

My companion sighed. "I expect we give the



poor dear mothers lots to worry about, little girl. I wish I'd been a better boy to mine."

"Is she dead? Oh, I'm so sorry!" I exclaimed, as he nodded silently. I saw that there were tears in his eyes and I edged up a little closer. He couldn't be a tramp. Tramps didn't talk that way and I noticed that his hands were as nice as my own brother's. "Say,"—I went on, feeling more and more friendly to this forlorn creature—"you'd better come up to my house to supper and stay all night. Grandpa will let you. Lots of people stay on their way to Milford. I heard grandpa say once that no one should ever be turned away hungry or tired from his door."

My companion did not immediately reply, as he succeeded just then in catching and landing a very nice fish with which he seemed much pleased. He gave me back the rod, thanking me for letting him "have a try at it," as he said. Then he remarked, hesitating a little, that I was very kind to invite him. "I think I'd better not accept, though," he added. "I don't look fit to go into a gentleman's house, but I'm very tired. Perhaps your grandfather wouldn't mind letting me sleep in the barn."

"Yes, he would," I replied promptly. "He won't let anybody do that. A man slept in his barn once—grandpa didn't know he was there, you know—and he burnt it down, and came running out when it was all afire. He smoked a



pipe, and went to sleep, and it caught in the hay."

"Well, I haven't a pipe or any matches, but of course I won't ask him, if you say not. I guess I must go on now, though, if I'm to get to Milford to-night." He started to fasten the fish he had caught, on my string.

"No, you keep that," I said. "I've got plenty. Perhaps when you get to the hotel at Milford they'll cook it for your supper."

"I shouldn't wonder," replied the young man dryly. He seemed pleased, though, and taking a string from his pocket fastened it through the fish's gills.

I noticed that the sun was getting low, and so, rising, said that I would walk along with him as far as our gate.

"You walk awfully slow for a man," I said at length. "You must be very tired."

"Yes—a little—but I'll be all right when I get to Milford and that nice hotel you were telling about. Would you do me a great favor," he added hesitatingly. "I haven't any matches left. Couldn't you get me just two or three?"

"Of course, I'll run in and get them, or you come, too. I'd like you to see my grandpa. He's ever so nice."

"No, thank you; I'll wait out here by the roadside." He sat down on a rock by a clump of bushes. "You won't mind bringing them out,



will you? I'll be so grateful. And don't tell any one, please," he added.

I ran nimbly down the hill on whose slope the house was built and threw my string of fish on a bench by the kitchen door.

Luella was alone in the kitchen getting supper. "Here you come, dirtying everything up, as usual," was her salutation. "What are you doing with them matches? Don't you touch another one. I'll tell your grandma on you," she called after me as I escaped and ran off to rejoin my new friend with my hand full of purloined matches.



## CHAPTER VII.

WHEN I ran out of the gate into the road, the stranger had disappeared. I was both mystified and disappointed. I looked towards Milford and thought that he must have walked a great deal faster than before in order to get out of sight so soon. I don't know what prompted me to do it, but I went slowly back to the rock where but a moment before I had left him sitting. There he lay beside it, half hidden by the low bushes into which he had fallen. His face was ghastly, his eyes closed.

"Oh, mamma, grandpa!" I screamed, starting for the house as fast as my legs would carry me. "Oh! Oh! there's a dead man by the road!" I had seen women faint, but I didn't suppose that men ever swooned or cried. Those must surely be feminine accomplishments.

My screams brought the whole household out of doors. Even Luella deserted her post, and the smell of burning cakes filled the air. My grandfather and Jonas bore the slender, limp form between them. They carried him into the sitting-room and laid him down on the great



hair-cloth sofa which, with its big cushions and knit afghan, was such a haven for the weary.

"Poor boy," I heard my grandmother say, "so young and so friendless !"

They were holding smelling salts under his nose and forcing brandy between his teeth. "Be quiet, Bess," said my mother, checking my tears. "He has only fainted."

In a few moments he opened his eyes, but they were wild and glassy. He called my grandmother, who was bending over him "Mamma," and tried to kiss her hands. I stepped forward, but he did not seem to remember me. Grandmother sent us all away and she and my grandfather put him to bed and sent Jonas to Milford for a doctor. "I do hope it's nothing contagious !" I heard my grandmother say.

"Nonsense, Caroline," replied grandpapa stoutly. "He's half dead with fatigue and hunger. Make him a bowl of good strong broth and that'll fetch him around."

After a while we went to supper, all but grandmamma, who refused to leave her charge. She had made him some soup and fed him a little when he would take it, but he seemed quite averse to taking anything.

When we were seated at the table my story came out, and I told over and over again all that the young stranger had said and done.

"Poor young fellow !" said my mother. "He



was probably getting matches to cook that pitiful little fish."

I thought not, and told how I had recommended the Milford Hotel and that he hadn't said that he wasn't going there.

"No, that boy is no beggar," replied grandpapa. "I'd like to know his history."

The old doctor came, a few hours later, gave something to check the fever, and said, as my grandfather had done, that it was simply the result of hunger and lack of rest. "He'll be all right in a day or two, if you can manage to keep him. He doesn't look as though he'd run away with the spoons. I shouldn't wonder if he was playing truant from his home."

The next morning our guest was quite rational once more, although too weak to rise. He apologized again and again to my grandmother and my mother for giving them so much trouble, and said that he was sure that he would be able to resume his journey by the following day. He slept a great deal and seemed perfectly worn out, and so no one was allowed to go in and talk to him. Once he asked for me, and when he was given some fried perch for his supper, he inquired if the little fisher-girl had been at work again.

The next day was Sunday and we all started early for church, which was held in the little school-house, two miles away. Grandpa drove,



but my grandmother did not sit beside him as usual. She stayed at home with Kitty and the invalid. Mamma and I occupied the second seat and Jonas and Luella sat behind. Nig went, too. He had no idea of a proper Sabbath behavior and although he always accompanied us to church, he made his customary side excursions for game, and frisked and barked very much as usual. He knew that he must not enter the school-house, however, and found plenty of company outside while he waited for us. Everybody else's dog, or dogs, came along, too, and I think that they probably quite looked forward to these Sunday meetings. Occasionally some misunderstanding arose among them and through the open windows came sounds of battle. Then one of the deacons would rise and tiptoe out, his stiff boots creaking noisily, to quell the disturbance. We would hear the crack of the big whip from one of the wagons and the sharp "ki-yi's" as he laid about vigorously with it; then, peace restored, he would come creaking in again. The sermon went on just the same during this performance, but I don't think that any one listened to it while the dog-fight lasted.

Grandfather Boyce always went to sleep—with many interruptions from my grandmother when she was with him. All of the other men took naps, too. I used to wonder why men



found it so impossible to keep awake and why the women didn't get sleepy. To see a woman nodding was a rare sight. Most of them sat up erect and prim on the hard benches, with their eyes fixed steadily on the preacher. He was a very sad man and watered his sermons with his tears. From his standpoint the world was a Vale of Tears, we were all worms of the dust, life was a mournful journey toward the grave. He used to preach a great deal against dancing and the sinful amusements of worldly people; he called the waltz "the Dance of Death." Probably not one of his hearers knew how to dance and few, if any, had ever seen the inside of a playhouse, but his favorite theme was always the godless pleasures of the "ball-room and the theatre." How I used to fidget and look longingly out of the window during these endless discourses! It seemed impossible to sit still and pretend to listen. I didn't want to really listen, for he made me feel too depressed and my spirit rebelled against his views of life.

On this particular Sunday I was uncommonly impatient to get back home again, for I wanted very much to see my "discovery," as grand-papa called our sick man. My curiosity was destined to be gratified. We found him sitting up in an easy-chair on the piazza with Kitty beside him, "amoosin' him," she said. He looked very pale, but his eyes were bright and clear,



When we came up the piazza steps he arose, a quick flush coloring his cheeks, and bowing to my mother and grandfather, he thanked them very politely and gratefully for all their kindness to him. "I hope, sir," he said to grandpapa, "that I shall be able to go on my way tomorrow, for I am ashamed to take such advantage of your hospitality."

"Stay till you're quite strong, my boy," said my grandfather, patting his shoulder, with a friendly touch. "You are perfectly welcome here."

My grandmother had, by her sympathetic questioning, drawn the young man's story from him. His name was Arthur Billings, and, strangely enough, his home was on the shores of Lake Erie—in Northport—my birthplace. His father was a wealthy merchant who, some years after the death of his first wife, Arthur's mother, had married a second time. "It was a great deal my fault, I suppose," said Arthur, "but we never got along well together. I missed my dear indulgent mother, and I couldn't help showing it. My father's wife thought I had been spoiled and started out with the idea of disciplining me. I was very anxious to go to college, for which I was nearly prepared, as my father had always promised to send me. She talked him out of it, saying that what had been good enough for him was quite good enough for



me. I sulked, for father was amply able to let me go, but that wasn't the right way to deal with him. I see that, now that it is too late. It made him determined to thwart me. Then I wanted to go into my uncle's office and read law with him. Uncle was very kind and would have been glad to have me. My stepmother was against it. She made my father think that I despised honest work and looked down on trade, by which he had made his money. He got it into his head that I should clerk for a few years in his store—long enough to understand the business and get the nonsense knocked out of me, he said. Then if I did well, he would make me a partner. I went to work, but it made me sick at heart. I wasn't suited to it, and my whole thought was to get away. I suppose I did very badly—anyway father grew more and more dissatisfied with me. We had a good many words about it, and finally, two months ago, I ran away, with just what little money I happened to have about me, leaving a letter behind in which I said he would never see me again until I had made my own way in the world and was independent of him. I haven't made much of a start, yet"—the young fellow laughed a little bitterly. "I thought that I would find plenty to do in the West, but I don't seem to be strong enough for farm work or harvesting. I nearly had a sunstroke a week ago, trying to help a



man with the haying and he told me he didn't want a hospital on his hands and I'd better go somewhere else. I didn't blame him—the work was heavy and the women had all they could do to cook and serve for the hands without stopping to take care of a sick man. I've been tramping most of the time in the last month. I sold my watch and everything else of value I had and the day that I met little Miss Bessie on the bridge I had had nothing to eat but berries. I never could ask for anything, and I was so nearly starved that I was almost willing to eat that fish raw.”

After hearing this story, my grandfather had a long talk in private with Arthur. He finally succeeded in persuading the young man to allow him to write to Mr. Billings, for my grandfather was unwilling to take such a step without his permission. In the mean time, Arthur was to remain with us until he could find something to do and he earnestly requested that he should be allowed to make himself useful in any possible way.

“I don't know what you can write, Mr. Boyce,” he said, “except to tell my father that I am here, and that I have made a failure of everything that I have tried to do. Don't tell him that I am sorry that I ran away, for I'm not. I'm only sorry that I haven't made a success of it.”



"Arthur," replied my grandfather seriously, "you forget the many years of love and kindness that you have known in your father's home, you forget that he still loves you and must be mourning for you, perhaps as for one dead. You forget all this because he has thwarted and crossed you. You have disappointed him, too, my boy."

Arthur hung his head and was silent.

"Now," went on my grandfather, "your father has a right to know of your whereabouts. I shall make no appeal to him for money or assistance, since you do not wish me to do so. I shall simply state the facts and let your future course be decided between you. It may be better that you should not return to your home. Wait and see.



## CHAPTER VIII.

IN the days that followed, Arthur proved himself a delightful companion. There was little that he could do to help about the farm, but he took charge of Kitty and me, greatly to my mother's relief, for she was not now able to afford a nursemaid. She had suffered tortures of anxiety whenever I was out of her sight. That was a great part of the time, for forest and field offered too many attractions for me to be willing to play about near the house. Arthur would often take both of us off to the woods—Kitty riding a part of the way on his shoulder, for her little feet soon tired. He built us a beautiful log fort, of the slender white beech logs which the country folk thereabout called "popple." We used to have glorious sham fights, thrilling escapes from the Indians, and I think that Arthur enjoyed them almost as much as we did. He was scalped so often by my dexterous tomahawk that grandpapa expressed great surprise that his hair remained so luxuriant. Nig took part sometimes, only he could never remember which



side he was on and rushed about so indiscriminately that he spoiled the effect.

The creek and the lake into which it emptied, two miles distant from my grandfather's house, was said to be bottomless. Probably they had not been very thoroughly sounded, but at any rate the bottom was known to be formed of quicksand, and anything dropped into the clear water sank rapidly out of sight. This naturally added to the nervousness that my mother always felt when I started out to fish, but I enjoyed my freedom so much that in spite of her terrors, she allowed me to go very often. With Arthur along she felt secure. I soon ceased to give him lessons in fishing, he went so far ahead of his teacher. My grandfather had managed to find us some fish-hooks, and on some days we had great luck. We discovered that the stream contained black bass as well as the smaller fry of finny creation, and once, after an exciting fight, Arthur captured a three-pounder. They were shy, however, and our tackle was poor, so we did not often catch one. As we sat on the bridge, dangling our feet over the water, he used to tell me thrilling tales of the muscalonge fishing in Lake Erie, and of how he had once caught one which two men could scarcely carry.

Luella could never become reconciled to Arthur's presence. She called him "that tramp" and sniffed audibly whenever he spoke. On the



other hand, although he was always very polite to them, it was easy to see that Arthur was puzzled by Luella's and Jonas' position in our household. They were on a footing of equality, and often joined in the conversation. I explained to him that we hadn't done that in Lepère, but that grandpapa wouldn't be able to keep help on any other terms. His face was comical in its astonishment, however, when one of the neighbors dropped in and invited the entire household, including Luella and Jonas, to a party at his home, and patronizingly adding that Arthur might "come along," too.

Arthur "went along." I heard him tell grandpapa that he enjoyed it as a character study. If he hadn't said that, I should have thought it was fun to him just as it was to the other young men, for he was a great success. The heiress of the neighborhood, a young woman whose father owned the largest farm thereabouts, took a fancy to him. She was very nice to him, so nice that one of the young farmers didn't seem to like it.

There was no dancing and no music. The company played games, some of which I was familiar with from playing them at children's parties in Lepère. It seemed very funny to me to see growing people romping through "Copenhagen," "Needle's Eye," "Clap in and Clap out," with kisses for forfeits. Arthur looked a little startled at first, but soon he was as lively as any



of them. When he ran through the "Needle's Eye," Miss Elvira May Johnson, the heiress, chose him by dropping her hands down on his shoulders as he passed along. The young man behind him said that Arthur had trod upon his toe and although Arthur was very polite and sorry, the farmer wouldn't play any more with Arthur in the game. He said that "folks that didn't know how to do correct had better keep out," and was very sulky and discontented. I was quite surprised, for I thought that Arthur played just as well as anybody and he certainly was not at all a clumsy person. Kitty and I concluded that the farmer must be a very bad-tempered man indeed, and so he seemed the rest of the evening,

That sad person, the minister, was present, but he didn't appear at all gloomy. He ate seven pieces of pie—Kitty and I counted. When I told grandpapa, he laughed, and said we would probably all get sent below in the next Sunday's sermon. Grandmamma said, "William!" and shook her head at him. Grandmamma was always very sensitive about religious subjects and she never allowed any one in her presence to laugh about the minister.

In a few days after this, Arthur left us. We had all grown to like him and were sorry to see him go. His father wrote for him to return to Northport, but said that he need not clerk in the



store any more. Mr. Billings thought that it would perhaps be better for him to stay for a while at his uncle's and he said that if his heart was still set on becoming a lawyer, he might begin at once to read law. Arthur was very happy and very grateful to my grandfather. With good wishes from all of us, he bade us good-bye and went on his way homeward.

Kitty and I did not enjoy the fort any more. It made us lonely just to look at it, and she took the scalping so seriously that it was rather spoiled for me. It is disconcerting to a wild whooping Indian to have his victim begin to cry just as he takes a firm hold of the scalp lock, and to be constrained to stop and console the victim by assurances that it is only make-believe mars the effect seriously. What I particularly wanted to forget was the make-believe part of it. Kitty got along nicely with Luella—in fact everybody was fond of the sweet, gentle little creature whose soft eyes were so like my mother's—and she rather preferred to hang about that haughty damsel. I should have liked occasionally to play by the kitchen door and make bread with a little piece of dough such as our cook in *Lepère* used to let me have to play with. But Luella was firm. She said I needn't come around "clutterin' up the kitchen with messes." And yet, hard-hearted Luella was perfectly willing to bake on a little tin the small loaf that Kitty's dusty fingers had



kneaded until it was almost black. I couldn't understand such distinctions.

One day grandmother took pity on my loneliness and sent over and borrowed a neighbor's little boy to spend the day with me. *He* could play Indian with most realistic effect, and I came weeping into the house with a cut in the side of my head, that had to be bound up by mamma with much arnica and many consoling kisses. She thought that we had better not play Indian any more. Charlie Gould was very sorry, and promised to be careful in the future, but mamma took the tomahawk away.

Then we played William Tell—my suggestion—for Charlie had never heard of that patriot. I was Tell, Jr. The first arrow took effect—not on the apple, but on the end of my nose, which bled profusely. Mamma held up her hands and said there wouldn't be a drop of blood left in my body if that boy stayed all day. She wouldn't let us go away from the house after that, so we played robbers in the attic, a most interesting place, as farm attics are apt to be.

I was the victim, of course, and Charlie was the burglar. When he wanted to light matches and scorch my feet until I told where my gold was concealed, I rebelled, and my screams brought the household to my rescue. My mother flew at the burglar and shook him and told him that he was a "little monster." This seemed to



surprise and grieve Charlie. He said that he never saw any one that got hurt as easy as I did, and that he would go home if "folks didn't stop finding fault so." He promised however that he wouldn't hurt me any more and even that he wouldn't lay a finger on me. We went out of doors again and chased the chickens, pretending that they were whites and we were Indians, until Jonas interfered, just in time to save a venerable white hen from Charlie.

Charlie had once witnessed a hanging and he told me all about it, with most blood-curdling details. We got so interested that he forgot his promise and wanted to play hanging, with himself for the hangman and me for the condemned man. I reminded him, however, that he was not to risk my life again, so he thought that Kitty would do nicely for the victim, and I could be the clergyman. I wouldn't consent to any tampering with Kitty, and we compromised on Nig.

Nig seemed very much pleased with the arrangements for his execution. He wagged his tail and licked Charlie's hand and altogether took a most friendly interest. When we pulled from under him my little toy wagon and left him swinging in the air, he gave one yelp and then subsided into silence and convulsive struggling. I thought it was becoming too serious and wanted to cut down my poor old playfellow before he really got hurt. Charlie drove me off and only



my cries for help, bringing my grandfather's prompt assistance, saved poor Nig—very much the worse for his experience.

Charlie, his pockets filled with cookies by grandmamma's generous hand, was escorted home by Jonas, after being invited warmly by the entire family not to come again. Neither Nig nor I were seriously injured, but the poor dog had been badly frightened and he eyed me reproachfully, evidently putting some share of the blame on my shoulders. I had considerable difficulty in re-establishing our former friendly relations, although I repented most deeply my part in the hanging.



## CHAPTER IX.

SHORTLY after Charlie Gould's visit, we had three days of such heavy rains as to keep us almost constantly in the house. Luella, autocrat of the kitchen, showed so much distaste for my society that I spent little of my time in her kingdom. As I recall it, it was a very attractive place. There was always a comfortable, sleek cat or two dozing near the big old-fashioned stove. On the well-scrubbed floor were bright mats of gay-hued rag carpeting. The windows were filled with potted geraniums and on one side of the wall, hung a big square cage, inhabited by a family of canaries. A large cupboard with glass doors was filled with dishes and kitchen utensils, and there was besides a deep closet from which were wafted odors of spicy cakes, pickles and preserves, that made my mouth water as I passed by. In fact, I always passed by so slowly and with such covetous glances, that Luella affected to think that I would slyly help myself if she were to relax her watchfulness.

My mother had in the days of old been a gay and interesting playfellow with her children, but



she was now too serious and preoccupied to invent new games and to give fresh interpretations to oft-told tales. With the thoughtlessness of childhood, I forgot her cares, and wondered at the change. She must have pined sadly through that long summer, separated from my father, and with no cheering news from him to encourage the hope of our being once more a united family, but she hid her sadness from us and was only a little quieter and more serious than of yore. It was at that time that the first white threads began to show themselves on her beautiful head, destined to wear so prematurely a silver crown. She used to sit a great deal of the time beside one of the windows with a big work-basket at her side stitching and darning patiently, for her active little ones kept her busy in repairing and replacing their garments. When we passed her window in our play, she always looked up with her old bright smile lightening the sadness that was becoming the habitual expression of her face. Sometimes we asked when papa was to be with us again. She always replied—"Very soon, dear," with a little involuntary sigh that contradicted her hopeful words.

The attic became my play-room during the rainy weather and I soon found that its resources were well-nigh inexhaustible. The serpent in this paradise was the hornet. There was a whole family of them, in fact—busy, irritable, resentful



of my presence and ready to sting on the slightest provocation, real or fancied. There is no creature in the world so prone to take offense unless it be a lobster, but one need never be overtaken by a bad-tempered lobster, while the hornet hangs around like the Irish gentleman inviting someone to tread on the tail of his coat. I was not acquainted with the habits of hornets when I made my first visit to the attic, and when one of the tribe began to buzz around and make slighting remarks about my appearance—his buzzing sounded like it anyway—I flapped my handkerchief at him and said, “Shoo !” This was the insult that he had been longing for and waiting for and his vengeance was prompt. My wounds were plastered with wet red clay until I looked like a patient at the German mud-baths, and while this homely remedy was being applied I listened meekly to a long lecture on the habits of the fiendish insect and took large doses of good advice about keeping away from his haunts. So keen was the memory that, for a time, I left the attic entirely to the hornets, but one stormy day, when there was nothing else to do, I crept cautiously back again. I behaved with so much decorum this time, that beyond making a few threatening remarks and darting wildly about, probably to further terrorize me, the hornets left me in peace. And I forgot them as I forgot everything else, in my first plunge into literature,



There were barrels full of literature in that delightful attic. I don't know why it had seemed worth while to preserve such things as three barrels of the "Beverly Repository of Art and Literature," but it had been preserved, and, for the first time in my life, I dipped into the sweets of romance. Fortunately for me, I fell upon something far more wholesome. I discovered a battered, paper covered copy of "Oliver Twist," which I read and re-read in the solitude of the attic. I had found pleasure before only in out-of-door, active games and sports. Here was a spring of pure delight from which I drank greedily, ever thirsting for more.

Besides the books there were many other interesting things in the attic. My grandmother's great spinning-wheel stood there—sometimes turning slowly as if touched by ghostly fingers, when the light breeze blew in from an open window. It was not one of the small wheels such as were used for spinning flax, but a large one, quite plain and unpicturesque, and in working it the spinner was obliged to walk to and fro. Many a stout pair of mittens have I worn, knit by my grandmother's busy fingers from yarn that she herself had spun. Then there was my grandfather's old trunk, the same that he carried with him when my grandparents went on their wedding journey in a canal packet boat, forty years before. It was covered with cow-hide with the



hair left on, and studded with bright brass-headed nails. Inside of it, carefully guarded and preserved from moths, were grandpapa's wedding clothes—a bottle green coat with a high rolling collar, decked with gold buttons, a flowered velvet waistcoat and a pair of light trousers. Other garments, antiquated in style, but less valued for their associations, hung from the rafters. When it began to grow dusk, they looked fearfully like limp bodies hanging there. There was one sturdy, dingy suit of old clothes that I always fancied was the body of Bill Sykes hanging with his neck broken from the chimney of the house where he had taken refuge.

There were ears of corn, little dainty ears for popping—some of them—of rich golden hue, and scarlet dried peppers, making bright spots of color against the dull umber of the rafters. Deep orange crook-necked squashes and pale yellow gourds hung beside each other, brown dried apples and reddish-purple onions.



## CHAPTER X.

SUMMER was drawing to its close. The yellow fields were nothing but stubble, and the carts came to the barns laden with spoils of the harvest. We were soon to leave the dear old farm, to me a place of pleasures ever varying. My father was not yet settled ; he had gone back to Northport, after eight years of absence, and was trying to find some business there. But to Northport from Milford was a long journey, and he did not think it best for us to join him until he was certain of remaining in the East. My mother wished to put me in school. After running wild so long I was growing unmanageable, and she thought I needed some restraint. So we were to go, the first week in September, to my cousin's, in Milwaukee, where we were to wait for my father either to send for us or to return to us.

We heard occasionally from Arthur Billings. He was still with his uncle, he wrote, and was very contented and happy. He was reading law and keeping on with his classical studies, too. He sent us a box of new books and maga-



zines, and to me especially a long, mysterious-looking parcel, which turned out to contain a fine bass-rod with a reel, a dip-net, and an assortment of hooks. I was wild over my new acquisition. The creek had been a good enough fishing-ground when I had only a birch rod and a bent pin. I now became aspiring and longed to try the lake ; besides, grandpapa had been promising all summer to take me there, and the next week we were going away.

We started early one morning, with our boat behind us on the wagon, and in it our fishing, tackle and the luncheon that Luella had grudgingly prepared for us (Luella hated fishing, for she didn't like to clean the fish for cooking, and I think that in her heart she wished us bad luck). Jonas was to drive and to row the boat ; grandpapa and I were to do the fishing. Nig went along, too. He was not invited, in fact, he was driven back several times, but he insisted on going, evidently thinking that this was an opportunity for great sport. After his usual fashion, he made little side trips into the woods as we went along. Dear grandpapa was so jolly that day ! He sang, as we drove along, in what seemed to me quite the finest tenor that I had ever heard. These were my last days with him. Happily, I did not know it. I thought that the future had in store for me many other summers just as bright. But never again was I to see the



old farm—never again to know the companionship of my dear grandfather, who had been such a merry playfellow, such an example of everything that is best and most lovable in human nature.

When the boat was put in the water, it was found to still leak a little, although put to soak the day before ; nevertheless, it had been so long unused that it was not water-tight. It wasn't a Rushton, but a very old tub of a boat, scow-built, with broad, flat bottom. Indeed, I think it was my grandfather's own make—he was quite handy at carpentering. The oars were fastened on pins, without any regard to the rower's reach or the length of his legs. I doubt, though, if Jonas would have been a fine oarsman under the most favorable conditions. He started off brilliantly by sawing the air with both oars and keeling over backwards, his huge feet flourishing wildly as he struck on his head in the bottom of the boat. We had great difficulty in righting him again and soothing his wounded feelings. "Doggon the thing !" he exclaimed, rubbing a lump on the back of his head. "It's ez hard to get holt on ez a greased pig." Jonas was not very quick to learn, and he repeated the same performance at intervals all day. He said that he was "that bunged up t'ud take a month o' Sundays to git over it. Seems 's if folks took the hardest ways t' hev *fun*, when



all they hev to do is t' set around comfortable t' *hum*."

"Never mind, Jonas," replied grandpapa. "We have to work hard for everything in this world that's worth while—even to have a good time."

"Wal, ther's no accountin' fer tastes, ez th' ole lady sed when she kissed th' *cow*. I'd a blame sight ruther set aroun' t' *hum* an' smoke, ef I had a day t' *waste*, 'n I guess the fish 'd ruther I would, *too*." This last remark was called forth by the flapping of a solitary sunfish in the bottom of the boat.

"Well, if you don't stop thumping the boat and splashing about as you've been doing ever since we started out, there won't be a fish in the lake fool enough to look at a bait," said grandpapa, with some asperity.

"Oh, grandpapa, I've got something!" I fairly shrieked, as my reel whirred around and the line began to pay out. I hung to the rod with both hands, and grandpapa stopped the reel.

"Strike him, now—quick!" he exclaimed excitedly.

I gave the rod a sharp jerk. It bent almost double when the line stopped running out, and I could scarcely hold it up. "It isn't anything," I said dejectedly. "It's just the bottom of the lake that I've got caught in."



"Pretty lively for the bottom of the lake," replied grandpapa significantly, as a sharp splash about five yards away and a sudden jerk told us that the game was hooked. "Get the dip net ready there, Jonas—I don't dare let go."

But our fish was not yet ready to submit to his fate. As we drew him gently towards the boat he took another sharp turn and threw himself quite out of the water, a boat-length away from where we had first seen him. With one hand my grandfather continued steadily to wind in the line, with the other he kept hold of the butt of the rod, for there was danger of its being jerked from my grasp. By this time the big fellow seemed pretty well tired out, and submitted tamely enough to be drawn into the side of the boat. We had a good look at him as grandpapa slid the net under his body, and he appeared to be fully two feet long. The sight of his captors spurred him on to make a last break for liberty, and with incredible swiftness he darted off before the net encircled him. The released reel fairly hummed. We had all our work to do over, and it was a good five minutes more before we had him fast in the net. He was a beauty—a black bass, as a more expert fisherman would have known at the first dash—and he weighed a full seven pounds—not an ounce less. He was probably the patriarch of the lake, for, although we had a fine catch—



thirty odd fish of various kinds—we caught nothing else that nearly approached him in size. My grandfather brought in a four-pounder, which gave him a very pretty fight, but he looked very small beside my monster. After this, even Jonas took an interest, and stopped grumbling at the waste of a good working day “a-foolin’ aroun’ th’ lake, ketchin’ enough fish t’ run a ho-tel.”

When we went ashore in the middle of the day to lunch and to rest a little, we found Nig waiting for us, and he claimed his share of the food—rather more than his share, Jonas thought. “Dern yer skin! Ye wan’t invited ez I know of,” he said. Nig wasn’t sensitive, however, and he hung about till the last crumb disappeared. I stretched my cramped legs by engaging in a wild romp with him while grandpapa took his usual noonday “forty winks.”

Late in the afternoon, when we came ashore again to start for home, Nig had disappeared. feeling that there was no more refreshment to be had, he tired of waiting for us and went home alone. When we arrived, Luella reproached us for our selfishness. “You might ’a spared the poor dog a scrap ’r two, I sh’d *think*,” she remarked indignantly. “Take him along ’n then let him *starve*. He come home pretty nigh dead, ’n I’ve been a-feedin’ him ever since.”



"Sho! the critter's got the laugh on *you*," said Jonas. "He et s' much I thought he'd bust, 'n then t' come back 'n purtend he hedn't hed a bite—haw-haw! Wal, he's got full fer once in his life, I guess." Nig, stretched out stiffly by the stove, quite unable to move from over-feeding, opened one eye and looked at Jonas with a knowing sort of wink. Luella was loth to admit that she had been taken in, and she affected to doubt that we had shared fairly with the dog. Even the languid interest he took in our supper failed to convince her of the trick he had played. The cats had a great feast on raw fish-heads. They were almost unapproachable for several days thereafter, so thoroughly had they appreciated and made the most of these odorous dainties—an unusual treat for them. Luella said: "Every last thing on the farm smells o fish. I jes' wish they could be lef' where they b'long—in the water. 'Taint right fer decent folks t' eat things 'at smells so."

I recalled to Luella her own fondness for onions, but she had an answer to that—Luella always had an answer. She said that "onions wuz good fer th' blood," thereby conveying the impression that she only ate them out of regard for her health. The domestic tyrant relaxed her severity a little when she saw our trunks were being packed, and she gave me to understand that it was only as a matter of principle that she



had been so severe with me all summer. "The kitchen's no place fer children t' mess around in," she said.

"Well, you always let Kitty make pies and help, and watch you when you fried doughnuts,"—this was my last great grievance, for at home I made it a point to be on hand when doughnuts were being made.

"Well," sniffed Luella, "'f you think you're like Kitty, and are goin' to be treated like Kitty, I can jes' tell you you're left. Kitty's nothin' but a sweet baby. It's different havin' her aroun' f'm havin' a great, overgrown, rampin', tearin' tomboy a-clutterin' up the place."

Perhaps after this formidable description of me, the reader may be interested to know that I was then rather a demure little girl of nine, quite small for my age, with rosy cheeks, a freckled little nose, and large, near-sighted gray eyes. Tomboy I am afraid I was. I liked to fish, to climb trees, to fight Indians better than to dress a doll or to "play house," like other little girls. My doll family had never been taken out of my trunk since we had been at grandpapa's. There were so many better things to do, I thought, on pleasant days, and lately I had begun to realize that books were the best pastime for stormy weather, and the best friends and companions for all weather and all ages—never failing, never disappointing those who learn to love them.



They who appreciate them early in life have reason to congratulate themselves that with these friends they may find a never-failing refuge.



## CHAPTER XI.

AFTER the country quiet to which we had become accustomed, Milwaukee seemed a bewilderingly large and noisy place. I felt the shyness and shrinking of a little country girl before the ease, the assurance, the fashionable clothes of my cousin's young daughters, one of whom was just my age. Alice was years older in manners and worldly wisdom, but she was years younger in other things. I ceased to wonder and began to patronize a little when I found that she did not know who Dickens was. *She* had never read "Oliver Twist," and even when I told her all about it she didn't seem impressed. She confessed that she didn't like very well to read, and turned the tables on me by remarking that what she really enjoyed was her dancing-school (I had never seen the inside of one) and her German lessons. She already spoke German quite fluently, and she negligently informed me that she was to begin French during the coming year. I keenly felt my ignorance and my country breeding, and resolved that I too would study German and French. I had not been much of a student in the little school at Lepère,



but now I determined that I would be more industrious, and I could scarcely wait for the opening of the schools to show my zeal for learning. My cousins lived in a fashionable quarter of the city, not far from the lake front, and the children attended the public school of that district. As it was situated in a rich neighborhood, the class of children attending it was exceptionally good.

Being of the same age as Alice, I had expected to enter her class and was deeply mortified that I was, after careful examination, put in the next division below. The superintendent found my acquirements decidedly unequal, and in accordance with the merciless public school system, I was graded according to the study in which I was the least proficient. I could read anything, spell almost any word, but could scarcely write my own name, and knew nothing of arithmetic beyond addition and subtraction. While I spoke fairly good English, I knew not a single rule of grammar. In my reading I had picked up a considerable knowledge of history, especially of English history, and I knew something of geography from the long imaginary journeys I had followed out on the maps. The very foundation of this whole school system was mathematics, and all that I knew served me to no purpose, since I was so lamentably deficient in this respect. The touchstone of a pupil's mental acquirement



in Lepère was his ability to spell anything, and the great part of my time in Miss Briggs' school had been spent in spelling matches—contests in which I usually came off victorious. It was fun, but it wasn't very practical, as I now began to realize. Although I had little taste for it, I bent all my energies to getting on in arithmetic, since that was the only way in which I could get on in anything else. I had no time for German, which was taught in the free schools, and my mother could not afford to send me to dancing-school. I went sometimes with Alice to look on, however.

Alice and Estelle, her older sister, were graceful little dancers and society women in miniature already. Alice's crimped golden locks covered a pretty head stuffed full of the most extraordinary ideas of life. Her coquettish and grown-up ways with the little boys at the dancing-class, her sage reflections about those who were or who were not "in our set" filled me with astonishment. There was one boy whom I thought very nice. He went to our school and he was also a member of my cousin's dancing-class. Alice would not accept him for a partner, although he was a very good dancer. "His mother keeps a boarding-house," she whispered to me in explanation.

"But he is just as nice as the other boys," I answered stoutly. "I think that he's ever and ever so much politer than Eddie Potter. Eddie



just slams around and steps on people's toes and never says, 'Excuse me,' or, 'Did I hurt you?' or anything."

"Oh, Mr. Potter is awfully rich and Eddie has a pony and cart, so he just thinks he can do anything he pleases. His mother gives lovely parties for him. Tom Hurd's mother never gives parties, so he *has* to be politer than Eddie, or nobody would like him."

"Well, anyway, I don't like Eddie. He called me 'speckle face' the other day, and made fun of my grandfather being a farmer."

"Did you go and tell that? Well, I just think you're too mean for anything," exclaimed Alice indignantly. "Mamma never tells that Uncle William lives on a farm. Farmers are always poor and they talk so funny and wear such queer clothes. I'll be sorry you ever came here if you don't stop telling things and acting so different from other girls."

"I'll be sorry, too. I'll be sorry I ever saw you if you say anything against grandpa. *Anybody* 'd be proud to have him for their grandfather"—the rising tears choked my voice. I turned my head away to hide them. Was the great world like this—I began to wonder—only caring for those who were rich and fashionable? If it were, I was sure that I would rather go back to the farm or to Lepère. Alice's dainty beauty—so attractive at first—became almost obnoxious



to me. I thought that being heartless was perhaps worse than being freckled, and I longed to lean my head on my mother's sympathetic breast and to tell her of my doubts and my bewilderment. I didn't like to tell her though what Alice had said about grandpapa, for fear of hurting her feelings, and so, for the first time in my life, I cherished a secret trouble.

Those were Dolly Varden, Grecian-Bend days—the latter days of the Second French Empire, when fashions were extravagant and reckless, as befitted the end of such a reign—and I was a little country mouse who had come to visit my cousins, the town mice. Like the country mouse in the fable I wanted to be back again in the freedom of the fields. I wasn't happy and I felt out of my element. Of what use, I argued, to try to learn, if people laughed at learning? And all the sweet, old-fashioned lessons that my mother had taught me seemed out of place here.

Before long Kitty and I were invited with our cousins to a children's party. Estelle and Alice, in new pink silk frocks, much be-flounced, with very crimped hair and gold chains with big locketts, their hands covered with white kid gloves, were so elegant that a lump began to come in my throat when I thought how strong a contrast my sister and I must make to them. We wore very simple but dainty little white nainsook frocks, and had each a necklace of coral beads, which



had always seemed fine enough before, but which now shrunk into insignificance in comparison to those beautiful locket and chains. Neither of us had any gloves—we had never worn gloves at the parties in Lepère—and my hands looked very brown against my white dress. Alice good-naturedly offered me a pair that she had only worn once, but my mother thanked her quietly and refused them. She did not think them necessary or she would have got me some, she said. I looked at her appealingly, but she shook her head. I am sure that although it would have hurt her pride a little to do it, for she was very sensitive, she would have let me take the gloves, had she realized what an affliction my bare brown hands were to me. They seemed to stand out with startling conspicuousness. I could not hide them, although I tried all the evening to keep them as much out of sight as possible. And then, worst of all, I did not know how to dance. We had used to play at our little parties at home games of forfeits, “Needle’s Eye,” “London Bridge” and “Going to Jerusalem,” but these young people did not seem to care for anything so childish. I managed to get through a quadrille and a lancers well enough, for I had watched them so often at my cousins’ dancing-class, but I could not waltz or polka. It was very mortifying to me to have to say that I didn’t know how, and I felt, with childish exaggeration, that I was



quite disgraced. When we reached home, my pent-up feelings gave way and I put my head down on my mother's shoulder and cried. "I'm so tired, mamma," I faltered in excuse. "My new shoes hurt me and I'm very tired."

But little Kitty, with solemn, sleepy eyes fixed on mamma's face, murmured with absolute conviction, "It was bootiful, mamma, an' I had two saucers of ice-cream—pink an' white an' green—an' a nice lady held me in her lap an' I watched the chilluns dance"—her drowsy eyes drooped and Kitty was fast asleep.

"Don't you think, dear," said my mother gently, "that our little Kitty has a happy way of seeing the brightest side of everything?"



## CHAPTER XII.

ALICE and I were walking home from school, kicking our way through the dried leaves (we liked to hear them rustle and crunch under our feet) when we saw Eddie Potter in his pony cart driving very fast down the street. He pulled up suddenly as he neared us and shouted, "Say, girls, Chicago's all burning up. Don't you want to get in and drive down to the lake? You can see the smoke—come on."

We were a little skeptical about Eddie's piece of news, but we thought that a drive on the beach in his cart was not to be despised, even if there was nothing to be seen when we got there; so we clambered in, forgetting that we had been told to come straight home from school. We used to forget that injunction rather often, I am afraid. Eddie drove very rapidly and the cart bounced and jolted us about so that we didn't talk much on the way but devoted our whole attention to hanging on to our hats and keeping from being pitched out.

A great many people had gone to the lake already, and were walking up and down the sand or standing in little groups discussing the prob-



able fate of the burning city. To the south of us in the distance hung a great smoke cloud, black and ominous. There had been a great many forest fires in the northern part of the state that autumn, and several towns had been entirely destroyed. People were very nervous. I heard one man on the beach say to another, "If the wind was just right we'd get sparks from there and everything here is as dry as a bone."

"Well," replied his companion, "might as well come first as last. It's the end of the world—that's what it is—only it's starting in spots instead of catching afire all at once."

His hearers laughed, but he, undisturbed from his conviction, gloomily shook his head and walked away alone. Eddie Potter began to sing "When Gabriel blows his trumpet."

"Sh! Eddie Potter, you're just awful!" exclaimed Alice severely. "S'posen' it *was* the end of the world—wouldn't you just catch it for making fun!"

Eddie was not easily silenced, and he continued to sing. The cold chills began to chase each other down my back. I wished that we hadn't come. I remembered hearing a rough man say that he "wouldn't be found dead," in company with some one he mentioned. I wished that we had chosen a less irreverent person to be found dead with, if this was really to be the end. I hadn't said my prayers that morning either, for we had



been late in awakening. I wondered if it would do to say them now to myself, standing up in the pony-cart, but mamma had always frowned on any such expedients as that; when we wanted to save time by praying while we were dressing, she had explicitly stated that one must kneel to pray. Another thought struck me—we were disobeying our mothers in being here at all. I sat down suddenly, for Eddie had started the pony galloping down the beach.

"Let's go home, Allie," I said, coaxingly. "Your mother'll be awfully cross."

"She won't know," replied Alice calmly. "She's gone to a guild meeting, and they always stay and talk and have tea and cake afterwards. She won't be home till supper time. Aunt Lou went with her, so we can stay just as long as we like."

"I'll have to tell though," I said despairingly. "Mamma asks me every day where I've been, and I couldn't tell her a story."

"Who wants you to tell a story, goosie?" asked Alice impatiently. "You can tell everything else and just leave out this part—oh, Eddie, *don't* drive so fast. You'll run over some one."

Alice's sentence was never finished. One of our wheels struck some obstacle half buried in the sand—the pony swerved sharply to one side. To my bewildered gaze, there was a brief glimpse of my two companions flying out into the air.



A thunderbolt seemed to fall on my head and I thought of the end of the world, as red rockets and stars danced before my eyes—then a rushing, roaring sound as of a great wind among forest trees and all was dark.

“Oh, how my head aches ! I just can’t open my eyes if it is time to get up,” I thought, turning uneasily and screwing my eyes tighter shut. The bed seemed unusually hard and I wished that I had remembered to pull down my window shade the night before, so that the sun wouldn’t glare in my face like that. I opened one eye just a little and shut it again, dazzled by a flood of crimson light from the setting sun, which was shining upon me across the blue waters of the lake. How did I get there by the lake, and how did it come to be afternoon, I wondered ?

“She’s all right now,” I heard a cheery voice say. “No bones broken.”

I remembered it all in a flash and sat up on the sand, holding my dizzy, aching head, and looking about me. There was a crowd of people gathered around, and some one had righted the cart and was holding the pony’s bridle. That culprit steed stood placidly still, with the air of one who is conscious that he has done his whole duty. Eddie was perched on the seat, looking a trifle pale and arguing with a big policeman who did not seem to want him to drive home by himself. I looked



for Alice and could not find her at first. Then I saw that she was with some lady who was rearranging her dress and putting on her hat. She did not seem much hurt, but she was crying a little, and when I came towards her she said, "Let's walk home, Bess. I don't feel like driving any more, do you?"

"Not with *boys*," I answered decidedly. "If I ever go riding again it'll be with some one grown up."

Eddie seemed to have forgotten all about us anyway. He was driving slowly away—the policeman walking beside his cart and apparently still lecturing him on his recklessness.

"Are you sure that you feel able to get home alone?" asked the strange lady, smiling down at us.

I felt very dizzy and shaken and my head ached badly, but I protested that I was quite well enough to walk. Alice was anxious to reach home before our mothers returned and so we set out, leaving the scene of our accident, with scarce a thought for the great conflagration that had drawn us thither.

"That's what we get for disobeying, Allie," I remarked gloomily, rubbing my fingers over the great lump on my forehead.

"Oh, pshaw! I've done it lots of times and nothing's ever happened before. I wouldn't have to tell mamma now, if my sleeve wasn't



torn. If we could get back in time to change our dresses before they come in from the guild meeting, we wouldn't have to tell for ever so long. My elbow is awfully scraped, but mamma wouldn't notice that."

"Well, I guess my mother'll notice the lump on my head the minute she sees me."

"Yes, that's just like you to go and get hurt right where it'll show and every one will know what you've been doing. I never *can* have any fun with you, your mother always finds out. You always go and tell, or else you do something stupid like this."

Overwhelmed by the injustice of this view of my misfortune, I could urge no excuse except that the time had been too limited for me to be able to arrange to strike on some inconspicuous portion of my anatomy. But Alice refused to be mollified. I began to suspect that she was rather glad to have some one to blame. Eddie Potter having escaped, I was being made to bear his share of the responsibility. I have since learned, both by experience and observation, that Alice was only acting out a very common trait of human nature. The world demands a scapegoat, and the frank, the fearless, the outspoken are always the ones to suffer, though perhaps less guilty than those who mask their failings under a veil of hypocrisy.

We were punished for our disobedience by



being sent to bed directly after supper. All the others were going down to the lake to see the lurid light of the great fire, so many miles distant. I could hear them getting ready to start—even little Kitty was going—and I bitterly regretted having lost my chance by my escapade that afternoon. When I heard the front door shut and the house relapsed into deathlike stillness, a hopelessly forlorn feeling stole over me. I drew the bedclothes over my head and began to cry. I couldn't help thinking about the end of the world. Supposing it should come now and find me alone, without my mother's hand to cling to?



### CHAPTER XIII.

I HAD not lain thus very long before I felt something tugging gently at the bedclothes. On uncovering my head, I found Alice standing beside me, looking particularly angelic in her long white nightrobe with her golden hair floating loosely about her shoulders. "Sh!" she warned, before I could speak. "Have they gone yet?" Her room was situated so that in it she could not hear the front door open and shut.

"Yes, long ago. Don't you just wish we had behaved ourselves this afternoon?" I sighed.

"Humph!" sniffed Alice, turning up the gas very high, and curling herself up on the foot of my bed. "We'll have some fun in spite of them and we saw the fire first, anyway." My cousin's mood was evidently not penitential.

"Mamma said I was to go to sleep," I hazarded, making a last struggle for the right path.

"Well, so did mine, but I couldn't get to sleep as early as this and I'm hungry. I'll just bet that Mary and the cook'll sneak out and go down to the lake just as soon as they think the family are out of sight. Let's go down to the kitchen and get something to eat."



I was hungry too, and I received my cousin's proposal with enthusiasm. We did not stop to dress, but stole softly down the back stairs in our bare feet. Sure enough, the kitchen was silent and empty. We were the only persons left in the big house.

"It's just the meanest thing I ever heard of to leave two little girls all alone at night," pouted Alice. "I've a good mind to eat up every crumb of the cake."

"It would serve 'em right," I assented warmly. "But do you know where it is?"

Alice gave me an expressive look. "Well, I rather think I've been there before." She went to a cupboard in the dining-room, and with my help, dragged a big tin-box out. "We'd better take it out in the kitchen, 'cause if our mothers *should* come home, we could just leave it and run quick up the back stairs before they got up there."

"Would you dare leave it?" I asked, trembling with apprehension. This was shocking conduct for the Day of Judgment, but I had become reckless. I felt that there was no salvation for me. "Cook and Mary *darsn't* tell," replied Alice triumphantly.

It was a well-plenished cake-box, and we hacked and carved recklessly at two majestic cakes, without being quite able to make up our minds which we liked best. Sometimes we



thought that the chocolate cake bore off the palm for excellence, and then to be absolutely certain we would try another piece of walnut cake, which would further warp our judgment and necessitate another trial of the chocolate.

At last, when we had reduced the contents of the box to a few fragments, a happy thought struck Alice. "Let's make molasses candy," she said. I was willing. I had forgotten the inevitable hour when our crimes must be brought to light and revelled in the delight of the present. We found the molasses jug, turned on all the dampers in the range, and soon had the largest saucepan full of amber molasses bubbling gayly and sending out savory odors. We opened the ice-chest, forgetting, of course, to close it again, and, after dripping the molasses on a big cake of ice that we succeeded in dragging out, found that the auspicious moment had arrived. As soon as the hot liquid had cooled a little, the candy would be ready to pull. We didn't stop to put it in another receptacle, we were so eager for the fun. We just set the saucepan on the cake of ice and sopped up with dish-towels the resulting streams of water. We buttered our fingers liberally and got ready a pan of flour, too, in case the candy should stick in spite of our precautions. Just then a slight noise in the direction of the ice-chest made me look around in time to catch a glimpse of a huge cat disap-



pearing through the open window dragging with him a turkey provided for the next day's dinner. I started in pursuit, Alice after me. But in her haste she knocked the saucepan off from its perch on the cake of ice and when I returned from an ineffectual chase, she was wallowing helplessly in a pool of half-cooled molasses. It was too funny, and I sat down convulsed with laughter. We had forgotten the flight of time, however, and, to my horror, I heard the voices of our returning family in the front of the house. I pulled Alice up and we made a wild bolt for the back stairs. We parted without ceremony at the top, and each dived into her own room and bed as noiselessly as possible. I lay there shuddering to think of the ruin and chaos in that kitchen and of Alice's plight. My feet were covered with molasses and the bedclothes stuck fast to them, but otherwise I had escaped pretty well.

When my mother came up to put Kitty to bed, I pretended to be asleep. I could not face her yet. Kitty's legs were not long enough to reach down to the molasses and I had a faint hope that I might wash it from the sheets in the morning before it should be noticed. Mamma softly kissed my forehead and turned out the light. I couldn't sleep, though, and I lay there for hours staring into the darkness, a victim to the pangs of remorse and of indigestion. At length, as I was



dozing off, a hand clutched me and a shrill and angry voice whispered in my ear, "What 'd ye do with that torkey, ye little imp, answer me thot, will ye?"

I sat up, for here was my Nemesis—first installment—in the shape of the irate cook. "I didn't take it, the cat stole it," I faltered, genuinely frightened.

"That's a loikely story, ye imp of darkness! Ye cudn't be satisfied without doin' something thot Mrs. Clifton 'ud be sure to foind out, cudn't ye? What'll I till her, I'd loike to know? There's the range fire all burnt out 'n the oice milted 'n molasses all over my clane flure. I cud fix it up 'n sind out airly fer sum oice, but how'll I git a torkey?"

"Oh, Bridget, I'm truly sorry. We didn't mean to. It was an accident. Couldn't you tell how you left the ice-box door open and the cat took it?" I was sinking into hopeless depths of duplicity.

"I'll have to," said Bridget with a deep sigh. "I'd loike to shake the dayloights out o' ye young-ones, though," she added vengefully. "If ye iver till, I'll kill ye—thot I will." She retreated slowly, vowing vengeance and muttering to herself as she heavily creaked on tiptoe from the room.

What a tangled web we had woven and how little it availed us! Alice was fairly encrusted with molasses and the sheets of her bed had to



be torn from her with some violence. We had both marked our pathway from the kitchen to our rooms with tracks of molasses (we hadn't thought of that), and the whole story of our misdoings came out by piecemeal. After that mamma was anxious to leave Milwaukee, thinking that Alice was a very bad example for me, and Auntie Clifton being just as firmly persuaded that my influence over my cousin was most pernicious, was, I fancy, not sorry that her guests were soon to depart. For, two days later, the great Chicago fire was over. My father having sent for us to join him in Northport, we were to go thither at once, only stopping a day or two in Chicago to see my brother, and to have a glimpse of the ruin and devastation that the fire had brought on the once prosperous city.



## CHAPTER XIV.

THE two days that followed our escapade were days of such grave anxiety and foreboding that our naughtiness was quickly forgotten. The burning city so near us was by day a threatening black bank of smoke, by night a torch in the southern sky. Sometimes sparks or bits of burning materials were blown as far as Milwaukee, and the inhabitants became very nervous and apprehensive lest that city should share the fate of Chicago. It was impossible to get definite news, and there was talk of missing people who were supposed to have perished in the flames. To those who, like us, had any one near and dear in that fiery furnace, the days were full of horror and dread. We could not know, and it did not seem possible that there should not be great loss of life.

It was about this time that my father sent for us to join him in Northport, and the day after the fire was over, when we at last had news of my brother's safety, we made our preparations to leave Milwaukee, and on the following day, bade farewell to our cousins, the Cliftons, and started on our way.



In spite of the lapse of years, the memory of that autumn day, October the ninth, 1871, is still clear and distinct. I can see my brother Laurence as he met us at the railway station, his face shining with happiness. There were tears in his eyes, though, and a certain tremulousness in his voice. He was a little ashamed of his emotion—it did not seem manly, to him I suppose—and he tried to be very cheerful and matter-of-fact. Mamma threw her arms about his neck and gave him a little squeeze that, for an instant, completely robbed him of his self-possession. I had not realized before how grave had been my mother's fears, for she had hidden them, as she always did, and had kept a composed and almost cheerful demeanor.

"Nonsense, mother!" Laurence said in a rather shaky voice. "I haven't been in danger for one instant. I've lost all my books, though, and Mr. Hill is ruined by the fire. It means beginning all over again, mother,"—with a little sigh.

"You haven't saved anything, Laurence?" asked my mother half timidly.

"How could I? A fellow can't go to dances and Germans and attend a fashionable church without spending a good deal of money, and that's what I've done."

Kitty and I trotted along, almost forgotten by these two who had so much to say to each other,



but I at least listened with a keen interest. This tall handsome brother with the clear-cut intellectual face was always a hero in my eyes.

"You must remember that you are a poor man's son, now, Laurie," poor mother said. "If I could only find that deed." The loss of an unrecorded deed to a block of Chicago land, bought by my father many years ago, was something I had often heard mentioned before.

"Ah, yes!" sighed Laurie. "It's no use to think of that, though. Do you know, the old man's heirs had begun building on it when the fire broke out? I went to see them about it, but they said, as they have always said before, that their father left no memorandum of any such sale, and, there being no deed and no record of a deed, they consider that we have no claim whatever on them."

"Legally, no, but morally we have, Laurie."

"They're not the sort to recognize moral claims, mother. Perhaps not many would do so, in their place. Well, none of us here know how we stand now. The fire has changed everything for us, and we've got to wait to get over the shock and see what is left before we make up our minds what we can do."

Laurence was in temporary quarters, as the house where he had been living was destroyed by the fire, so we went for the two days of our stay in the city to the home of some other



cousins of ours. They lived on Michigan Avenue, in what seemed to me then a very palace. Laurence spent with us as much of his time as he could spare, and piloted us about among the still-smoking ruins of the burnt district. I have never seen anything like the thoroughness with which the fire had done its work. Entire squares of buildings had been reduced to ashes and small *débris* that had settled down into the cellars without leaving even part of a wall or a chimney standing to mark the site. The fire had devoured everything along its track, and those who had witnessed the scene said that it seemed to pervade the air,—to fall from the heavens themselves.

We bought some trifling relics, pieces of iron and glass all melted and welded together into an indistinguishable mass, and a sorry-looking china doll, who was, apparently, fireproof. Kitty and I were devoted to her; I don't know why, except that she was different from any other doll I ever saw. The heat had faded her cheeks and dimmed the blue of her eyes, and all over the face were sprinkled grains of brown sand, or mortar, which had become firmly imbedded in her china cheeks. She had exactly the appearance of many pale, freckly-faced, faded-eyed children I have seen in country districts.

Laurie did not tell us whether Mr. Hill was



going to be able to resume his business on its former basis or not. I fancy that if he did not already know that it was impossible, he more than suspected it, for he grew paler and more anxious as the days passed. When we bade him good-bye, I heard my mother say to him in a low tone, "Keep up a brave heart, Laurie, and if you *don't* get a position, you must not hesitate to write me the truth. We shall never be so poor that we have to refuse help to our children, I hope."

The pinched, hunted look left my brother's face momentarily, and he answered stoutly, "There'll be no need for that, mother; there is always something to do for those who are willing to work." But as the train moved slowly out of the station, and he turned, after a last farewell wave of the hand, he hung his head and there was a weary droop to his shoulders. Poor boy! he was learning his first lesson, fighting his first battle, gallantly enough, it must be owned, but with what secret discouragement, with what misgivings!



## CHAPTER XV.

IT was a very different scene on which we opened our eyes the following morning. The Northport of those days was rather a quiet, sleepy old town, scarcely recognizable in the gay and growing city of the present time. Here were peace, prosperity, quiet thrift, old-fashioned comfort. Square houses, built of small red bricks, with white wooden porches and trimmings, or frame dwellings, very similar in outward form, stood directly on the street, with their three steps encroaching on the pavement, after the old Philadelphia model. They had plenty of ground, but it was almost always at the rear of the house, or along one side. They made no pretensions to architecture ; indeed, I imagine that most of them were like Topsy, and "jes' grewed," without the aid of a preliminary plan. One might have thought so, at any rate, after visiting a few of them and noting the clumsy devices, the strange inconveniences in their construction. I remember one that was particularly fascinating to my eyes, so accustomed to everything new and rectangular. The ground-floor was laid out without any great surprises in its construction, but



it was in the second story that the incautious explorer was in danger to life and limb. After mounting the rather narrow stairway, the stranger found himself in a hall of ordinary dimensions, leading him on till a dark place was reached. Then he fell down three steps—placed there apparently for no other reason than that he should fall down them—emerged shortly into the light, regained confidence, turned a corner, fell up three steps in another dark place, turned again, and shrank back aghast to find himself on the verge of again falling, this time down the precipitous flight of back stairs that led to the kitchen.

This was Mr. Billings's house, become again our friend Arthur's home, for he had returned to his father's roof. There was a glacial atmosphere about the place, however, that detracted from the enjoyment I should have experienced when we were invited there to tea, and there was a look in the second Mrs. Billings's cold light eyes that said "Hands off! Children should be seen and not heard," and a host of other repressive and disagreeable things. I shrank into myself and felt ever so much smaller and many years younger under that good lady's watchful glance, although, to my mother's great mortification (and my own, too, I may add), I persistently forgot to say "Yes, ma'am," and "No, ma'am," when addressed, and I dropped my knife on the floor with a horrid din that rang in



my ears for a long time afterward. I choked, too, on my glass of milk, and spluttered until I felt that I should die of shame. Arthur, who, by request, sat next me, pounded me sympathetically on the back till I was forced to recover, and murmured encouraging words in my ear which had the effect of further disconcerting me. Before the tortures of that evening, I had never known that I was shy. Evidently, it was a quality that had come to stay though, for, like Mary's lamb, it followed me to school.

To the public school I went very soon after our arrival in Northport, and again I, a girl of ten had, owing to my deficiency in arithmetic, to undergo the humiliation of being classed with children two years younger. How my heart swelled with rage and scorn as I sat among them ! What did *they* know of " Oliver Twist " and Baron Trenck ? They had never even heard of Dickens. Bitter tears stole furtively down my cheeks and, splashing on the slate, washed out my bungling attempts at " doing sums." I sulked disconsolate through my other too easy tasks and, when playtime came, I folded my hands and sat at my desk—a picture of dignified loneliness and misery. I had not a wise and gentle teacher to guide me out of the labyrinth of my troubles. On the contrary, the young woman who presided over our class was a coarse and unmannerly person who had indeed



"risen from the ranks." She was cross-eyed and distressingly plain, and she had a way of fixing her pupils with her one available eye and addressing them as "You!" I, to my great discomfiture, could never tell when she was looking at me—at that time we did not know that I was shortsighted—and, when I got up to reply at the wrong moment, or ignored her when she really addressed me, she became furiously angry. She thought that I was making game of her infirmity. I, all unconscious of my own, was utterly at sea. Everything that I did seemed to be wrong. I went home every afternoon with my hateful arithmetic under my arm to be pored over during the evening hours; it was always under my arm, it seemed to me, or open before my eyes. In my dreams, even, it sat on my chest, or danced a hornpipe across my fevered pillow.

Sometimes, as I crossed a little foot-bridge that spanned the race by Case's big flour-mill, I looked gloomily into the dark, fast-flowing stream and thought that death would be a welcome release from my trials. Could I ever, ever succeed in that great gloomy place, which outside looked so like a factory and inside seemed to me like a mill that pitilessly ground us up and either turned us out made over after a certain pattern, or rejected us altogether. The question was—could I ever be made into that pattern? In my discouragement, I thought not.



## CHAPTER XVI.

OUR new home was much smaller and humbler than the big house in Lepère. It was an old building, dating back from the first half of the century and it was characterized by some of the same peculiarities of construction of which I have spoken in the preceding chapter. It stood flush with the street, with the usual three steps leading up to the door and, viewed from the front, it had something of the blank and staring look of a face devoid of eyebrows and lashes. There was no porch and there were no trimmings to relieve its architectural plainness. All of our ground was at the back of the house, a long and rather narrow lot which boasted of a few fruit and shade trees, some neglected flower-beds and, at the end furthest from the house, a small frame structure used by the former occupant of the house as a stable. We, of course, kept no horse, and the shed was too far away to be used for storing wood and coal. Therefore, with the exception of some barrels and packing-cases in which our belongings had been brought from the West, the place was empty. It made a very nice play-house for us children and served by



turns as a church, a hospital, a theatre, a school-house and even as a prison.

While not in that part of town where the newest and handsomest houses stood, we were still in a pleasant and respectable neighborhood. Our street was well shaded by large maple and locust trees, and the red brick sidewalks were bordered with a strip of lawn. Northport was the county seat and, not far from us stood the old court-house, a rather imposing monument of the classical taste which prevailed early in the century. Behind the court-house was the county jail, a red brick building, much newer and absolutely plain, fortunately little seen on account of the height of the surrounding walls and of some very tall locust trees growing just outside them.

The autumn was mild and protracted that year, After school hours, it was my delight to play, during the remainder of the short afternoons, in the back-yard with my sister Kitty. I had never played with her very much before—there was so great a difference in our ages—but her docility, her admiration of me was like a balm to my wounded self-esteem, hurt to death in my encounters with the public school system.

At that time I was of a very martial turn of mind and I revelled in “battle, murder, and sudden death.” In our campaigns, I was the commanding officer of our forces, Kitty being



either a drummer boy or a color bearer, and I think that never before were a general's resources so severely taxed. I gave the commands in stentorian tones as we rushed on the imaginary foe, I imitated the booming of the cannon and the shrieks of the wounded, as well as blowing, when I had breath to spare, on a tin trumpet which served as a bugle. Then, when all was over and the victory was ours (as it always was) I turned surgeon or nurse and looked after the wounded—Kitty and her dolls. These were exhausting affrays, but doubtless they served me well after the long confinement of school hours.

Just about supper time one evening in the latter part of November, it occurred to me that I had left my books in the stable, having gone there direct from school. It was by that time nearly dark, but I knew that I should need the books after supper, and so, without saying anything about it, I threw a wrap about my shoulders and, slipping out of a back door, ran down to the shed. As I entered the door, I fancied that I heard a slight movement. At first somewhat startled, I drew back. "Pshaw! it is only a mouse," I said to myself, and, after slamming the door two or three times to frighten away the intruder, I walked boldly in, and groped my way to the manger where I had laid the books that afternoon. As I stepped behind a big packing-case, my foot struck against something at once



soft and unyielding. With a startled cry, I drew back but was instantly seized by my skirt and held fast, while a fierce voice that came from near the floor hissed, "Shut up, you little devil, or I'll choke the life out of ye!"

Without loosening its hold on me, the reclining figure rose to its knees and thus brought its face on a level with mine. In the dim light I could make out a cruel, fierce-looking countenance, low-browed, with a shock of wild and tumbled hair. The nose was flat and turned very much to one side, and the lower part of the face was covered with a short, stubby beard. It was a physiognomy not calculated under any circumstances to inspire confidence, but, in my present plight, the wonder to me was that I did not die then and there from sheer fright. The big hand that still clutched me gave me a fierce shake, and my captor went on, "Now then, what are ye nosin' 'round here fer?"

"N—n—nothing," I stammered through my chattering teeth. "I—I just left my—my books here—that's all."

"Oh, that's all, is it?" giving me another shake. "Well, you just take your books and get out, now! Here, come back here!" he added, as I started to make a hasty exit without stopping for books or anything else. "What you goin' to do—goin' to run up to the house and tell?" Once more I was seized in the grasp I had just escaped,



"Oh, no, sir, indeed I wasn't. *Please* let me go. It's 'most supper time and mamma won't know what's become of me."

"Don't any one know you're here, eh? Well, then, I've a mind to jes' cut yer throat this minute. *Then* you'll be sure not to tell." He gave a horrid chuckle that froze my blood, and began to fumble in one of his pockets with his disengaged hand. I could not speak; my tongue was so dry that when I tried to utter a sound it only clicked against the roof of my mouth, and around the roots of my hair I felt a curious, pricking sensation. Even in the agony of that instant, I felt curious to know if my hair were really standing on end and half raised my hand to my head.

"Here, you keep still now," growled the man. I don't know whether he thought I carried a concealed weapon under my braids, for he dodged a little as though to avoid a blow.

"Now look here," he went on impressively in his hoarse whisper. "I ain't here to hurt anything if I'm left alone. I'm tending to my own business an' if any one interferes"—"here he swore an oath so terrible that I trembled afresh—"I'll cut the heart out of 'em. *Mind* that! Now you know what I'll do if you say one word about me. I'll come and burn the house down over ye when ye're asleep, I'll——," another flood of such language as it had never before been my misfortune



to listen to. "But if ye do edzackly what I tells ye, I won't hurt ye or any of your fambly."

"Oh, thank you," I gasped fervently. "It's very good of you, I'm su——"

"Now cut that," he rejoined, as if he suspected a sarcasm that I was far from intending. "I ain't here because I'm *good*, but that's no business of yours ner anybody else's. There's three things you've got to promise me, before I let you go. First—s' help ye Gawd, hold up yer right hand now an' say—that ye hope to burn everlastin' if ye tell."

He seeméd somewhat mollified after I had taken this dreadful oath and went on in less blood-curdling tones. "Nex', s' help ye, ye'll bring me somethin' good t' eat before ye go to bed to-night. If ye don't get here before *nine* o'clock I'll come and burn ye up in yer bed. Now *mind*, no bread an' butter an' sich trash. I want meat an' cake, er doughnuts—things like that. Could ye get some whiskey?"

I was sure I couldn't. There was none in the house, I told him, but would he take cider instead?

"Cider!" He gave a contemptuous snort. "Well, if that's *all* you've go, I'll take it, but bring plenty. If ye've got whiskey, though, I'll find it out and *then*," he paused to think up some fresh threat.

I assured him that I was speaking the truth



and, as he scrutinized me closely, he seemed to become satisfied that I was indeed doing so.

"The third thing is a hat, one of yer father's hats. Bring that along, too."

"Oh, I couldn't," I faltered. "I couldn't take one of papa's hats. That would be *really* stealing."

"Well, ye kin take yer choice. If ye *don't* bring it yer pa won't have a head to wear it on, long; that's all." The horrible significance of his tone, as he drew his finger across his throat to further make clear his meaning, had its intended effect.

"I'll bring it—indeed I will. Now let me go, please, *please*. I shall die if you talk to me like that." I began to sob hysterically.

"Stop, you little fool, I never *see* such a fool. Ain't I tellin' ye, ye'll be all right if ye do as I tell ye. Now *cut*, and stop yer whinin' 'fore ye git into the house."

I flew till I reached the back of the house. Honora, our maid-of-all-work, was just ringing the supper-bell and I looked in through the window at the smoking hot supper, wishing that I could at once transport my share of it to the inmate of the stable and have done with the job. As I opened the door into the dining-room, Kitty came frisking in. I had been hoping that I should be first on the scene and so get possession unobserved of something to carry away. I went



up to the sideboard and, as slily as I could, snatched a piece of cake from a plate.

"Oh, give me some, Bess!" said Kitty, whose observation I had been unable to escape.

"Sh—you'd just better hush!" I exclaimed, "or I'll—I'll burn you up," I added desperately. Such a short time does it take for evil communications to corrupt.

"Why Bessie, my child, what are you saying?" My mother was behind me, she had heard my threat. I felt that I should sink through the floor. "Put back that cake and take your place at the table. You may do without cake this evening."

I sat down, feeling desperate, and forgot to bow my head as my father asked a blessing on our food. At this rate, how was I to feed my strange guest?

"Bessie, I have asked you twice if you want any meat?" Papa's voice broke in upon my musings.

"Oh, excuse me, papa. I was thinking about something else. Yes, I'll take some—lots, please, if I can't have any cake to-night." I fixed my eyes vengefully on the innocent Kitty. If she only hadn't been around at the wrong minute. I had heard other girls with little brothers or sisters say that that was apt to be the case, however.

"I will give you a proper amount, Bessie, and



then if you are still hungry, you can have more," replied my father, passing the plate. Everybody was against me to-night, I thought bitterly, and here I was, trying to save their lives at the risk of my own. I couldn't manage to slide anything off my plate, either. Somebody was always looking at me, it seemed. Either Honora was walking around the table, or mamma's, or papa's, or Kitty's eyes were fixed on me. I dropped a piece of meat into my lap, as if by accident, but my mother immediately called my attention to the fact, and I was obliged to restore it to my plate. I finally gave up the attempt, thinking that I must manage to get something after the meal was ended.

"Well, Bess, what has become of that ferocious appetite you were telling us about?" asked papa, at length, noticing my almost untouched food. If they only knew, I thought! How could I eat with that horrid secret on my mind, and I'd got to steal, too, and no doubt tell endless falsehoods in order to carry out my designs. My brain was in a whirl. I was not a child who would have adorned a Sunday-school book, but such wholesale duplicity as I was at present involved in seemed terrible to me. I faltered some excuse about not being hungry any more (which was true enough) and leaned back in my chair. My mother looked at me scrutinizingly, and under her gaze my eyes fell. Afterward, she told me



that it was my pallor and lack of appetite that made her regard me so closely, but, at the time, I trembled for fear that she suspected my secret.

The cake plate passed me without stopping, but I did not care. If there were to be no chance of carrying a piece away from the table, it ceased to matter to me whether I had anything more to eat or not.

After the supper table was cleared and Kitty was put to bed, we usually sat in the dining-room of an evening—mamma with her sewing, papa sometimes with his violin, sometimes with a book, and I with my arithmetic and slate, receiving occasional help and instruction from them when I got to a very hard place.

On this evening, when the others left the table, I hung back. Eluding the vigilance of Honora, I obtained possession of two goodly pieces of cake. The meat had been carried into the kitchen, but, while she was engaged in clearing the table, I made way with a big turkey drumstick and some slices of beef. Catching up a towel and wrapping my plunder in it, I fled hastily up the backstairs to my room. At the threshold of the closed door I stopped, however. My mother was already there, putting Kitty to bed. I hid in the hall-closet until all was dark and quiet in the bedroom (it seemed a very long time) and, as my mother went down the front stairs, I softly opened the creaking door and



possessed myself of a small pitcher from the washstand. So far all was well, but how was I to fill it with cider? Even if I could do so unobserved, I felt that I dared not creep down into the dark cellar. There might be another unsuspected visitor lurking there, too. I had lost confidence even in bolts and bars, after my afternoon's experience.

"Well, he can just do without cider," I said aloud, in my desperation. I had some money, though, in my little iron bank, enough to buy more cider than I could possibly carry out to the stable. Perhaps that would pacify him. In my haste to unscrew the top, I let it fall on the floor with an awful crash. Kitty half sat up in bed and muttered something in her sleep and, downstairs, I could hear my mother push back her chair and utter some exclamation. With shaking fingers, I poured out the pennies and five cent pieces, and, grasping my bundle of food, I again sought the seclusion of the closet.

My mother was calling me from the foot of the stairs. I heard her say as she turned away, "Henry, what *do* you think ails that child? She looks so wild and strange—" the rest of the sentence was lost as she re-entered the dining-room. I groaned aloud. So she suspected something and I must keep on with my weary game of hide-and-seek.

It seemed the most serious step of all to take



one of my father's hats. Child as I was, I knew that everything must be made to last as long as possible now, so I determined to take the old soft felt hat that he wore in stormy weather. I tiptoed down the stairs. Papa was reading aloud and I could hear the snip-snip of my mother's scissors as she cut out some embroidered edging. I took down the hat with tears in my eyes. It seemed too dreadful to think of such a man wearing my dear father's hat. If only I could have had time to talk to him and convince him of the error of his ways. A thought struck me as I folded up the hat and stuffed it into my pocket. I would take my catechism out to him. Perhaps I could induce him to read it and be a better man. It was in the drawer of the hall table and I took it out, with a sigh of regret. On the paper cover was written in my father's best hand "Bessie Benton, Miss Carson's Class." I had half a mind to tear off the outside, but no—maybe that would be sacrilegious. It must go as it was.

With my bundle behind me I edged into the dining-room.

"Isn't it time to study, Bessie?" asked my mother, raising her eyes from her work.

"In a minute, mamma. I'm—I'm—*hunting* for my arithmetic." Another lie on my already overburdened conscience. "I must have left it in the woodshed, I guess."

At last I was free from observation. From the



woodshed I stepped out into the starlit night with a sense of positive relief and I ran half way down the yard before I stopped to think what I was going to. Oh, how could I put myself in the clutches of that awful creature again? My speed slackened. I glanced back over my shoulder at the bright window of the room I had left behind. Mamma's head was bent low over her work; Papa had taken out his violin and he had a rapt, dreamy expression on his face as he drew the bow across the instrument. The music came faintly to my ear—"Home, Sweet Home."

"Oh, I wish he wouldn't play *that*! I've got to save them, now," I whispered as the tears rained down my face.



## CHAPTER XVII.

MY uninvited guest took my poor little savings eagerly enough, though he was as ungracious as ever. His temper did not seem to have improved during my absence. He anathematized the hat, which was rather too large for his bullet head, and swore at the quantity and quality of the food I had brought. As for the catechism, he received that with such scorn and derision, that I repented even having made the effort to save such a creature. It seemed to me as if the lightnings of heaven must instantly descend and destroy a man who talked as he did about the Episcopal catechism.

"Now," he said deliberately, after stowing away the food and money in his pockets and pulling papa's hat well over his eyes. "I've a good mind to cut yer tongue out, to save ye the trouble of tellin' about this."

"Oh, I promise on a whole stack of Bibles, hope to die this minute, I won't. *Don't*—after I've taken such a lot of trouble, too—" this ingratitude was too much and my tears flowed afresh.

"Huh!" grunted the man. "Precious lot



*you've* done for me. Here you've ben a stuffin' yerself with all kinds o' things t' eat an' I a-starvin' out here. It's enough to make a man *sick* to think of!"

Somehow, I could not bring myself to feel particularly moved at this touching picture. Perhaps my friend was unfortunate in his manner.

"Well, now," I remarked, with a dignity that seemed to me perfectly awe-inspiring under such circumstances. "I'll put my hand on the catechism and promise never, *never* to tell, but I just can't stay here any longer."

"Who want's yer?" retorted the man.

"And you'd better go away from here right away," I went on ignoring this rude interruption. "Kitty comes down here to play every day and she's so little, she'd surely tell, and oh, if you should frighten *her*—" I broke off with a sob.

"I'll be gone from this place by to-morrer and don't yer furgit it. Now don't give me any more o' your guff. It 'ud take more'n *you* ter frighten *me*."

I took up my books and edged off towards the door. "Well—good-bye," I said lamely, as I backed out.

"Good-bye—ef you ain't the rummest—" the remainder of the sentence was lost, for the despised catechism in one hand, my school books in the other, I was making the best use of my legs to get back to the house.



"Bessie, child, come here," said my mother, as, flushed and panting, I entered the dining-room.

"How long you have been!" She laid her cool hand on my forehead, but I shrank guiltily from her touch, "Your head seems very hot, dear; does it ache!" she asked tenderly.

I did not reply. I could not. A great ball seemed rolling up and down in my throat.

"You had better not study to-night," she went on, still caressing my head. "Come upstairs and I will put you to bed and sit by you until you are asleep—just as we used to when you were little."

Oh, the blessed balm of that motherly touch, of that motherly presence! What a protection I felt it about me as I dozed off into feverish slumber, starting wildly up two or three times, to find that dear form still there by my bedside. What could happen with my mother there, awake, and watching over me? As if in a dream, I heard her say once "I am afraid she is going to be ill, Henry. She is so restless, and moans and tosses in her sleep."

And I awoke to find the faces of my parents bending over me. I clasped their hands in mine. "Don't go away," I murmured, and sleep again overtook me.

When I next awakened the sun was shining into my room and Kitty had gone from beside me. From the room below came sounds of



voices and the rattle of dishes. "It must be late," I thought, and although I felt weak and languid, I made haste to dress and go downstairs.

As my consciousness became gradually complete, I began to wonder if my experience had been real, or if I were the victim of a horrid nightmare. "If the money and hat are gone, I shall know," I said to myself. The money certainly had disappeared, and my bank lay in two parts on the bureau. I screwed it together again before I went down to breakfast. As I passed through the hall, I took note that my father's old hat was not there. Then it was all true and I must carry the burden of that dreadful secret alone. With as much cheerfulness as I could assume, I assured them that I was very well; and, indeed, the appetite I brought to my breakfast went far towards proving my assertion. After the fast of the night before I was ravenous, and even an overloaded conscience was forgotten in ministering to the wants of an empty stomach.

Papa had his morning paper beside his plate, and as usual, read aloud scraps of news from time to time.

"These Tweed Ring exposures are taking on a very serious look, Lou. It is amazing to see how wide-spread the corruption has been. Hello, here's that man Fancher escaped again."



He read the staring head lines of an article on the first page of the journal.

THE DESPERATE BURGLAR, FANCHER, ONCE  
MORE AT LARGE. HIS ESCAPE A MYSTERY.  
JAIL OFFICIALS SCORED.

“ ‘Sometime about dusk last evening, the burglar Fancher, who was an inmate of the county jail, there awaiting trial, made his escape. It was almost immediately discovered and the sleuth-hounds of justice were on his trail. Nevertheless, up to going to press no trace of his whereabouts has been discovered. It is thought he must have had accomplices both within and without the jail walls, however, and a most searching investigation will be made. Those who have, either by willful carelessness or by active help, aided this monster to escape, will not be suffered to evade the penalty of their crime. It is a felony to assist a felon to elude the consequences of his misdeeds. May the perpetrators of this piece of rascality soon be lodged in a felon’s cell ! It is stated that a large reward will to-day be offered for the apprehension of the miscreant. His description, as follows, will also be posted—George Fancher, 5 ft. 8 in. in height, age 35 years, weight 165 pounds, stooping shoulders and shuffling walk, dark eyes, complexion swarthy, dark, thick hair, a



short beard, extraordinarily large hands and feet, and nose flattened and turned to one side.' ”

Here I dropped my head on my hands and burst into tears. I had not only deceived, stolen, lied, but, worse yet, I had committed a crime. I was in danger of imprisonment, disgrace. Papa had let his paper fall and was staring at me in astonishment, my mother was at my side trying to soothe me, and Kitty howled from sympathy.

“Why, what a most extraordinary child !” exclaimed my father. “What in the world ails you these few days, Bessie ? ”

My mother raised her hand to silence his questions and drew me away from the table into another room. She sat silent, stroking my hand until I grew somewhat calmer.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

"Now, my little girl," said mamma when my sobs had ceased, "I want you to tell me what is on your mind. Last night I thought you were ill, but it seems now as though it must be something even more serious."

She paused ; she was perhaps thinking of the time that I read the two novels in secret and suffered such pangs of conscience that I was finally forced to confess, or the time—but why enumerate my crimes ?

There was a long pause, then mamma went on persuasively, "I don't think that you've ever found me very severe with you, Bessie, and you know how much better you felt after you told me about 'St. Elmo.'"

"I *can't*, mamma," I burst out. "It's something I can't tell about. I promised I wouldn't."

"'A bad promise is better broken than kept.'"

"Well, it wasn't just an ordinary promise, mamma, but I put my hand on my catechism and said I hoped to die if I told."

"It must have something to do with Honora, then. I saw you carrying your catechism out into the kitchen last evening, after you had acted



very strangely at supper. If you still refuse to tell me, I shall have to question her."

I felt a little more easy on seeing my mother wandering so far off from the track, though it occurred to me that Honora might have missed one of her dish-towels and the provisions I had taken.

I was excused from going to school that morning, and, while my mother went to interview Honora, whose loud protestations could be heard in the distance, my father tried his persuasive powers on me. He was at length forced to abandon the attempt without making any more headway than my mother had done, and he almost broke my heart by going down town without kissing me good-bye. All I could say was that I must not, dared not tell, and this I reiterated.

As the days wore on, my parents ceased to question me any further, and, although I felt that there was a little constraint between my mother and me, still things went on very much as they used to do. I gradually ceased to tremble as the morning papers announced that no clue had been discovered that would lead to Fancher's capture, or to the discovery of those who had aided him. It might never be found out, I argued. I had heard of murderers who were never discovered and perhaps I might be equally fortunate. Still, I could not help reading the



posters on the fences ; they had a horrible fascination for me, and from afar off I grew to recognize the very black lettering at the top which, near by, read “\$500 Reward ! For the apprehension of George Fancher,” etc. I did not know what the word “apprehension” meant. I had thought it signified fear, and, used in such a connection, it puzzled me greatly. But I never dared to ask any one for an explanation, or indeed, to mention anything that bore on this dread subject. And so time passed on and my fears were gradually allayed, though my conscience was not at ease. When in church they used to sing “He the hidden sin glossed over, can discover.” . . . . I always quivered at the thought of my own secret, and when our clergyman began :

“Dearly beloved brethren, the Scripture moveth us in sundry places to acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness”—it seemed sometimes that I must get up from my knees and make a public confession of my wrongdoing.

However, these were only occasional twinges of conscience. I was too healthy a little girl to brood always over such a secret, and, in many respects, life was beginning to look much brighter to me. I was getting on better in arithmetic now, and was expecting soon to be promoted to the higher class, where I really should have been



from the first. It was well on in December, and the children of St. John's Sunday-school were busy in practicing Christmas carols for the usual celebration. Every Wednesday and Saturday evening we went to the church, a merry crowd of boys and girls, and sang to the accompaniment of the big organ. The church, under those circumstances, was perfectly fascinating to me; only a small proportion of the gas jets were lighted, and the dim and shadowed arches looked twice as imposing as by daylight. It seemed to me as though it must be very much like Westminster Abbey, barring the tombs. Many years afterwards, when I visited the Abbey, it was a great surprise that it looked not one whit more vast or imposing to me then than St. John's had seemed to my childish eyes.

Miss Carson, the teacher of my Sunday-school class—an ethereal blonde, with High Church tendencies—was not often with us at the rehearsals. She was supposed to be “going out into society,” a vague term that embraced the somewhat mild dissipations of Northport society. When she did come, the sweetness of her voice and her seemingly wonderful art in using it, made her appear like an angel to me. She always sang with her head a little thrown back, and her delicate face and pale gold hair seemed to absorb all the light and shone out strangely against the dim background of the stone arches.



I was unfortunately several shades darker than Miss Carson, but my ambition during that entire winter was to be as much as possible like her in other respects. During the service, I bowed as fervently as she, and I should have liked very much to cross myself as I had seen her do, only that I knew that I should be laughed at by my small companions and so refrained.

I was beginning to make friends in Northport—not much at school, for I was still in too low a grade to care to do that—but in Sunday-school and in church and with the boys next door, who at first limited their social amenities to making faces at Kitty and me over the fence and shouting some doggerel rhymes to our name. These were the two Langdon boys, Tom and Teddy, aged respectively twelve and ten. Then, in my Sunday-school class were Nettie and Cora Billings, cousins of our friend Arthur, the children of his lawyer uncle, gentle, pretty little girls, whom I, however, secretly thought very lacking in resources for a “good time.” In the same class were also Cissie Hankinson, a big, clever, good-natured girl of eleven, who looked years older than she really was, and so obtained little credit for her unusual brightness, and Elinor Harwood (a cousin of Cissie’s, but unlike her in every respect), a small, mouse-like child, secretly jealous and spiteful, though extremely pretty, with innocent brown eyes and blond, curling hair. There were, besides



these, Emma Fantucci (pronounced in Northport Fan-took-y), the child of an Italian father and an American mother, and, last of all, the little deformed Carrie Crane, who had hip disease and limped painfully.

We had heavy snows in Northport, and, after school, I took my sled to the long hill near by. It led down to the mill-race—frozen over now—and it took great skill in steering to turn the sleds at the bottom of the hill just right to follow its frozen surface. Teddy Langdon was good-natured enough to show me how, and, after a few painful failures, I learned to guide my sled aright. Teddy was a very pretty boy. I did not think so then—indeed, I thought very little of my friends' personal appearance in those days. He was dark and rosy-cheeked, with curling hair and a straight, well-built figure. He was so very well-favored that he attracted an amount of attention which he found very annoying. At school, some of the older girls—young ladies of sixteen or seventeen—used to try to kiss him, and people were always talking about his curls or his eyes. He used to beg to have his hair cut so close that the curl would not show, and he tried to be as rough and boisterous as it was possible for a boy to be. I sometimes wondered why boys liked girls at all; they had such an unfeigned horror of being or doing "like a girl," and it hurt my feelings sometimes to have Teddy say, as he often did, "Girls



don't know anything." That was his last unanswerable argument, when he found that I was getting the better of him in any respect. Perhaps I should not have liked him so well, if he had been politer to me; I don't know now whether that would have made a difference, but, as it was, I was absurdly anxious to have Teddy's good opinion, and fairly wore myself out in my efforts to extort a word of praise from the candid youth—quite to no purpose, however. Teddy was like many other frank people that I have since met—unsparing of criticism, but most parsimonious of praise; plain-spoken when their friends are in the wrong, silent when they are in the right. Tom Langdon was really very much nicer, though I did not realize it then. He was not good-looking, and he was as anxious to please as Teddy was indifferent. One would have thought him the younger of the two, Teddy lorded it over him to such an extent. Oh, but there never was such a one as Teddy for taking the worst spot in the hill, coming down it with a rush that made one dizzy to watch, turning his sled just at the right point to gracefully sweep down the mill-race almost out of sight. And his aim at snowballing was unerring, though I must confess that he made the snowballs a *little* too hard for the thorough enjoyment of other people. Then he was such a fast skater, and he did the "outside edge," the "Dutch roll," "figure eights,"



and skated backward just as well as he did forward. In mental acquirements, he did not shine so pre-eminently, but he had such a disdainful way of going through a lesson that he did not know ! It almost made one ashamed of studying and trying so hard to get on. In fact, I rather concealed my studiousness as something detrimental. Teddy confided to me that he didn't like "digs," as he called those who worked hard at their lessons. I dreaded having him think me a "dig," and, after he began walking home with me from school, I used to shove my arithmetic down deep into one of my ample coat pockets in a way that was very damaging to the pocket. But, have my friend think I studied at home—never !



## CHAPTER XIX.

WE were going to a party—Kitty and I—a Christmas party. My mother thought that it was almost too much dissipation for us to have the church celebration on Christmas eve and a party the next night, but we did not agree with her. How I should ever settle down again to everyday life, I did not know. We lived for a whole week on the anticipation of the lovely party that Mrs. Fantucci was to give for Emma. Our costumes were a great source of worry to me until I began to gather from things that I overheard, from measurements that were made, and from scraps that occasionally *would* drop from mamma's work-basket, that we were to have new frocks for Christmas. Of course, I took mamma's feelings too much into consideration to appear to suspect anything ; but, having discovered so much, I was on tenter-hooks to know for whom the red one was intended and for whom the blue. Being fair, and blue being considered my predestined color, I longed for the red, which usually fell to Kitty's share. And then, one day, Emma Fantucci brought to Sunday-school



a piece of the dress she was to have, a deep garnet silk, and passed it round sily when Miss Carson was talking, as she sometimes did, to Arthur Billings, who taught a class of boys in the next seats to us. Arthur's boys could do anything when Miss Carson was talking to him, and Arthur never seemed to be the wiser.

"I *guess* I'm going to have a new red dress, too," I said, trying to assert myself a little.

"You *guess*," giggled Elinor Harwood. "Can't you tell colors yet, Baby Benton?"

What I should have done, if Miss Carson had not suddenly resumed her attention to the class, I do not know ; but, as it was, I had to content myself with looking witheringly at Elinor at intervals when my teacher's eye was not on me. Then I forgot the insult I had received, and fell to picturing Emma's dark beauty set off by that lovely red silk. Doubtless she would wear, too, the Roman sash I had heard about, which her father had brought her from Rome. I roused myself with a sigh as we rose to sing a final hymn. It was absurd, I thought, as I glanced sidewise at my pretty teacher, perfectly absurd that Arthur Billings never could find his place any more and had to look on with Miss Carson over the partition that separated their pews.

"I wonder what she'd say if Tom Langdon tried to look over with me?" queried Elinor Harwood.



“‘Children, children, remember where you are!’” mimicked Cissie Hankinson, as we tumbled on our knees for the final prayer, Cissie sliding off from the little bench on to the floor, a feat which she was apt to perform. Miss Carson raised her delicate eyebrows and looked at her reproachfully, which made Cissie give me a violent nudge in the side. I promptly fell off the bench with a distressing clatter, picked myself up red and shamefaced, and had not the courage to approach Miss Carson afterwards and explain that my imitation was accidental. She had forgotten me probably, anyway, for she was walking out with Arthur, and he had possessed himself of her big hymn-book and book of lessons as though he meant to walk home with her.

“Spoons!” sniffed Teddy as we walked behind them. We were walking home together, too, as we often did, but the situation was saved by the fact that my escort did not offer to carry anything for me, or step out into the snow and give me the cleared part of the walk. On the contrary, when he saw anything or anybody that he wanted to snowball, he unceremoniously unloaded his books on me.

“Are you surely going to the party, Teddy?” I asked, still pursuing the topic that was uppermost in my mind.

“I d’ know. I’d go if I didn’t have to wear that blamed velvet jacket. I’ll lie down in the



snow in it or—something—pretty soon,” said my companion desperately.

“Oh, I wouldn’t stay home for that,” I said, attempting consolation. “I guess you’ll look just as nice as the other boys.”

“Yes, it’s easy enough for a *girl* to talk. They never care how silly they’re fixed up, but it makes me sick to wear a velvet coat with a lace collar, just ’s if I was a hand-organ monkey.” Mrs. Langdon’s artistic ideas had been a great source of suffering to her youngest born, and it was no solace, but rather an added grievance, to him to overhear grown people call him “a cherub” or “a perfect picture.”

“Well, *I’m* going to have a new red dress, Teddy.” Hope by this had grown to a certainty in my mind.

My friend received this news without even a polite show of interest.

“I guess they’ll have ice-cream, don’t you?” he asked, a gleam of hope lighting his discontent.

“Oh, they’ll surely have that, and maybe lemonade and candy too. I went to a party in Milwaukee where they had all those things and little paper caps and mottoes with crackers that you pull.”

“Oh, yes, and then the girls squeal and put their fingers in their ears. *They’re* no fun. I wish we could have fire-crackers—real big ones. I don’t see why people don’t have ’em in the winter.”



"They'd burn up the houses, you silly, and if you threw 'em out into the snow they wouldn't go off."

"You could hold 'em in your hand, then. Tom held one in his teeth once till it began to sputter and it went off before it got quite to the ground, too. Tom ain't afraid of anything. Say, come on and go skating after dinner, Bess. I know an awful nice place."

"On the lake? Mamma wouldn't let me for anything, Teddy, not on Sunday, anyhow."

"No, t'aint on the lake. It's ever so much nearer, but I shan't tell you where unless you'll promise to come along."

I finally compromised by promising to go along and slide. I did not think that that would be so wicked as skating. It would be no worse than walking, I argued.

After dinner I slipped out without saying anything about it, and joined Teddy, who was lying in wait for me around the corner. Together we proceeded to the pond which he had discovered, a low lying vacant lot about a quarter of a mile from our house, where the snow had melted and frozen again before it had had time to dry up. We had the ice all to ourselves and found it much nicer than the mill race, which was always more or less cut up by sled runners and by the numerous skaters. I began to regret so bitterly not having brought my skates, that Teddy



offered to take off his and lend them to me for a few moments. He instantly repented of his generosity, however, and took back the offer, saying that instead he would show me some fancy skating. This did not serve to keep me very warm, and, instead of watching his feats, I ran and slid as fast as I could about the edge of the lot. I was going nicely when my foot struck some object partly frozen into the pond, and I sprawled flat on my face on the ice.

‘Did the ground come up and hit you, Bess,’ shouted Teddy facetiously from the other side of the pond. He did not hasten to my help, but skated quite leisurely towards me. I raised myself on all fours and looking at the cause of my fall I was astonished to see my own name, “Benton, No. 12,” written in my mother’s best hand.

‘Hello, what’s that?’ asked Teddy. “B-e-n-t”—but I covered up the writing and strove with all my strength to tear up the material—in vain, however. It was frozen fast. A light had begun to dawn on me, and my heart thumped painfully as I realized that one evidence of my crime had come to light.

“Why it’s a towel—and it’s got your name on it, Bess,” went on Teddy, pushing me aside.

“Oh, what shall I do,” I wailed. “Promise, *promise* me, Teddy, that you’ll never tell about it.”



"Really and truly—cross my heart," assented Teddy cheerfully. "What did you do—hook it?"

"No, I wouldn't hook,"—I stopped, remembering my father's felt hat. "I mean to say," I went on slowly, "that I didn't put it here, but I guess it's one I took to do up a—lunch in. Do help me get it out."

"I will—next summer. I'd like to see you get it out before."

"I've got to," I responded firmly. "Lend me your knife—please do."

"Now, don't you break it," said my cautious friend, producing the knife, with some reluctance. "If you do, I'll tell."

"*Teddy!* and you just said cross your heart that you wouldn't. Well, I never!" Words failed me in which to express my opinion of such juggling with promises, and I went on in silence, hacking at the frozen cloth until I succeeded in cutting out the tell-tale writing.

"What you goin' to do, now, Bess—throw it away?" asked Teddy, as he skated slowly about me.

"No, I'm going home now, and I'm going to put it in the stove." I thrust the piece deep into one of my pockets and rose to my feet. Teddy wouldn't go, he had not finished skating yet, and so, after making him repeat his promise, I set off alone.



## CHAPTER XX.

"BESSIE, what does this mean?" asked my mother. "This" was a grimy, damp bit of cloth which I recognized as the fatal piece of towel I had taken such pains to hide.

When I reached home on Sunday afternoon, I found my father and Kitty popping corn over the dining-room fire. So interested did I become in this process that I forgot the urgency of the errand that had brought me back. The next morning, my mother, in making her usual Monday round through my pockets for handkerchiefs, brought to light the piece of towel, and the "murder was out."

I hung my head in silence, trying to think what excuse I could offer.

"This is a part of one of our towels, Bessie. Why did you cut it up like this? Do you think we are so rich that you can afford to waste so wickedly?"

"I didn't put it there, mamma," I faltered.

"Didn't put it in your own pocket, Bessie?"

"Yes—no—I mean in the pond"—and I went on to explain confusedly how I had found the



towel, and that I didn't like to have it lie there all winter with our name on it for everyone to read. Mamma was displeased with me for going to slide on Sunday, and I could see that she did not quite understand about the towel. As a matter of fact, she had never entirely regained confidence in me since my refusal to tell the cause of my strange conduct some time before.

"Since you are so lucky in finding things, Bessie, perhaps you can help your father to find his soft hat. It is so snowy this morning that he wants to wear it." My mother fixed me with her eye.

I could feel my face growing scarlet, but I answered, as I could truthfully do: "I haven't the least idea where it is, mamma."

My embarrassment had not escaped her, however, and later I overheard her talking about it with my father. "It's the strangest thing, Henry," she was saying. "The child couldn't possibly want such things. It can't be that the child is developing kleptomania."

Mania meant insanity, I knew, but what was the rest of it, I wondered. Anyway I was pretty sure I wasn't going crazy. Anybody would have done as I did about the towel, though I had long since doubted the wisdom of my course in regard to the burglar. If I had only been a clever little girl, I should have gone straight off and told a policeman, and then I should have got the five



hundred dollars' reward. *Five hundred dollars!* I often thought of that brilliant possibility and of what use I might have made of the money. I should have bought my father a new hat, of course, a beautiful, shiny silk one, and an overcoat lined with satin, and mamma a silk dress with yards and yards of real lace on it, a mauve silk, very light in shade, like the party dresses she used to wear in Lepère, when I was a very little girl. And I would have a pony and a red silk frock like Emma Fantucci's, and Scott's novels, about which Cissie Hankinson had been telling me—and a new set of Dickens', with lots of pictures, and a sled just like Teddy's, and some club skates, and—a thousand other things.

Then, sometimes, it came into my mind that if Fancher could get out once, he might do so again. In that case, he would certainly have come back and wreaked his vengeance on me and on my innocent family. Perhaps the comparative peace of mind I was still able to enjoy was worth five hundred dollars ; I wasn't sure.

We had a beautiful snow storm and the world looked very white and fresh for Christmas. The carols went of quite well, though I am afraid that some of us sang hopelessly off the key. I know that Cissie, who stood next to me, did. She persisted in singing something which she called alto. It consisted of a sort of growling accompaniment, many notes lower than the air, and



it had a very demoralizing effect on the singers near her. But the church looked beautiful with its evergreen decorations and the big tree full of candles and gay silk bags of candy for each boy and girl in the Sunday-school,

I didn't sleep much that night, and, when I did, I dreamed of a giant Christmas tree whose chief decoration was a brilliant red frock for me. As I advanced to receive it from the hands of the superintendent, Mr. Rawson, it seemed to shrink in size, and he said, "It's for your little sister"—then the big organ began to boom and drowned the sobs with which I received this information. I heard Teddy Langdon laugh behind me, and Elinor Harwood was pointing her finger at me and saying, "Can't tell colors—can't tell time—can't do sums—Baby Benton!"

I awoke feeling very uncomfortable, and found that it was already day. The house was absolutely still, but I knew that our presents were arranged on our chairs in the dining-room. That had been done the night before; so I stole down softly in my night-gown. My chair was nearest the door, and spread neatly over the back was—a blue cashmere frock. On the opposite side of the table, at Kitty's place, I caught a glimpse of the red. The tears welled up in my eyes. It was such a disappointment! Mechanically I lifted it up and looked at it. It was very pretty—barring the color—I thought. There



were little lace frills in the neck and sleeves, and it had a dainty finish about it that must have cost my dear mother many weary stitches. A big tear splashed down on the sleeve. I seized my napkin and rubbed the spot vigorously. I would have died rather than have mamma know how badly I felt about it. I laid it back over the chair with a sigh and began to look further. There was a beautiful green and gold copy of "Ivanhoe," with "Merry Christmas, from Brother Laurence," written in a dashing hand on the fly-leaf. I squeezed it to my breast. Dear Laurie, how I wished he were there to see how happy he had made me! Then there was a little work-box from papa, and a card on which he expressed the hope that it would teach me to be neat and industrious. The box was very pretty, but the sentiment, strangely enough, found no echo in my breast. I don't think I really wanted to be industrious, and sewing was not a favorite occupation with me, nor ever has been since.

I could not waste time to go upstairs and dress. I just curled up on a lounge and was so absorbed in Wamba's jesting with Gurth that I had to be almost forcibly recalled to a sense of reality when the family came down to breakfast. I was always thus with a book—oblivious to everything that was going on.



## CHAPTER XXI.

EMMA'S party was not so fine and fashionable as the one Kitty and I had attended in Milwaukee, but it gave me infinitely more pleasure. We did not dance so much, and we played the old-fashioned games with which I was familiar. Good-natured Cissie took me out in a secluded corner of the hall and taught me to waltz. She had never been to dancing-school either, but she had learned to dance, as she had learned so many things, half by inspiration. In fact, most of Cissie's acquirements were gained outside of schools and had a flavor all their own.

The other girls all said my frock was "lovely" and that I looked "too sweet for anything." This was part of our childish etiquette, and the stereotyped reply to such a compliment was, "No, *I* look horrid, but *you* look just lovely. This formula was repeated any number of times during the evening, until I grew almost tired of so Chinese a form of politeness. Especially did I weary of saying that I looked "horrid," for I became quite convinced that this was very far from being true, and my natural frankness prompted me rather to smile graciously and say,



"Yes, don't I?" with the utmost complacence. Fortunately, I did not commit this glaring breach of good manners, but kept my satisfaction to myself.

Teddy was there, arrayed in his black velvet jacket and lace collar, very sulky, except when he occasionally forgot himself. His behavior pained and mystified me. I had hoped that he would think me pretty with my crimped and floating hair and my dainty new frock, but he avoided even looking at me. He wouldn't dance, and he said that the games were "silly." All he seemed to be thinking about was to keep himself and his jacket as much as possible in the background until supper time came. Then he displayed an eager interest which impressed me as somewhat unmannerly.

A new boy, whom I had never met before, Joe Taylor by name, was very attentive to me and helped me quite politely at supper. He was even good-natured enough to bring Kitty her plate—a great thing for a small boy to do. I should have had a beautiful time, if it hadn't been for Teddy. Did he think I danced too much with Joe Taylor, I wondered, or did he dislike my crimps? I puzzled and fretted over his coldness until I could stand it no longer, so the next time I passed near him, I said, "Hello, Teddy!" by way of bridging over the gulf. He responded "Hello!" without even turning his



head. Emboldened by this doubtful favor, I edged a little closer.

"What's the matter, Teddy? Are you mad at me?"

"No, I ain't!" snapped my friend, with half-averted face. "I wish you'd leave me alone."

"I will—forever," I responded tragically, as I turned away. My heart was breaking—there could be no doubt about that. It felt just like it, and I longed to get off by myself and cry; but I remembered that the heroines in the "*Beverly Repository of Art and Literature*," never cried under such circumstances. No, they danced on, the gayest of the gay, disguising a breaking heart under a brilliant smile. Well, I had done with friendship, I thought. Life would never be the same again, though no one must suspect it. Joe Taylor was not a particularly interesting youth, but he was tall and he was quite mature; he must have been as much as thirteen years old. So I smiled on him the rest of the evening, and he grew more and more attentive, until the other girls and boys began to tease us, and Elinor Harwood called me "sugar and molasses" and a variety of other derisive names. I didn't mind that so much; my grief was too great for me to notice such trifling annoyances, and, from time to time, I stole furtive glances at Teddy, whose face became more and more sullen.

Joe began to be rather sentimental. He



seemed to enjoy being teased about me and sang "She was the belle of the ball," when one of the other boys laughed at him. I was acting very much like a heroine, I thought, and I had almost begun to enjoy my breaking heart, when my father came to take us home.

Joe hung around in the hall waiting for me to put on my wraps. "Can't you come out and skate, to-morrow," he whispered, as we bade each other good-night. "I don't think I can live without seeing you again soon."

I wanted very much to laugh—Joe's languishing expression was so absurd—but no, I must carry on my part, no one should suspect my breaking heart, so I promised to skate the next day, if I could get permission.

My mother was waiting for us. It was quite twelve o'clock, but she sat up, as she always did, to hear our account of the party. Kitty danced in ahead of me, full of her news, and shouted, greatly to my discomfiture, "Bess has got a beau, mamma—a great, big tall boy—'mos' grown up."

My mother gave papa a quick glance, half of annoyance, half of amusement. "Where do they pick up such ideas?" she said.

"I guess it's in the air, Lou," replied my father, laughing. He pinched my ear a little. "Let's have no nonsense, Bess. You're too sensible a little girl to think about beaux."



"I hope so, papa," I responded calmly. If they only knew that Joe Taylor was less than nothing to me! Only the conduct of my false friend could have made me show him so much consideration.

I was too tired and sleepy to be kept awake long by my breaking heart, but the next morning I assured myself that it was still fractured and managed to squeeze out a tear or two. I looked discontentedly at the round and rosy reflection of my face. This would never do. Heroines always grew pale and thin, though gay, witty and admired as much as ever. Sometimes their voices would have a touch of pathos and their eyes a sad, far-away expression. I practised the expression a little as I dressed, though I had to own that my healthy appearance marred its effectiveness.

After the small duties that my mother imposed on me were done, I had made up my mind that I should read "*Ivanhoe*" all the rest of the morning. As I whisked rapidly about the parlor with a big feather duster, I caught sight of Teddy outside. He was acting in so unusual a manner that my attention was attracted. My first impulse was to go to the window and make a face at him, but no heroine that I had read of ever did such a thing, and so I refrained. Instead, I watched him from behind the shelter of the lace curtains. He was trying to coast on the walk in front of our house—a



perfectly preposterous thing to do, for there wasn't the slightest slope there. He would run for some distance and then throw himself on the sled, which only ran of itself a few yards. Teddy couldn't care for such tame coasting as that, I felt sure, and my fractured heart swelled with triumph, as I noted the furtive glances he cast at our windows. Teddy was sorry, Teddy was ashamed.

I parted the curtains, and, without raising my eyes from my work, I carefully dusted the window sill and the surrounding woodwork. Very deliberately I turned away, still without looking out, and, going to the other window, began to repeat my cleaning operations, when a crash against the pane and a sudden rush of cold air put an end to my task. Teddy had thrown one of those hard snowballs he knew so well how to manufacture.

For an instant he stood open-mouthed, gazing at his work, then took to his heels with all possible speed. My wrath was tremendous. I could never, *never* forgive him now. He had put himself outside the pale. The door opened and my mother's head appeared. "What's the matter, Bess?" she asked. "Have you broken anything?"

I pointed to the broken window and the snowball on the floor. "Some—some wicked boy threw a snowball in here, mamma." Even then I did not wish to betray my former friend, for I



didn't think he had quite intended to do such mischief. My mother's bright face clouded.

"Oh, dear," she sighed. "Another leak!"

"I don't think it will leak, mamma," I said eagerly. I was on my knees gathering up the snow and pieces of glass. "We could stuff a newspaper in. 'Most all the windows are that way down at Flanagan's, by the canal."

Mamma gave a little laugh. "I didn't mean that sort of a leak, Bess," she said, "but never mind. I'll paste it up so we won't catch cold, and you must put on your hood and coat and go after a pane and some putty. I think papa can put it in quite nicely."

I was delighted to go; this errand would perhaps give me a chance to meet that young scamp, Teddy, and so afford an early opportunity of letting him know what I thought of his conduct. He was nowhere to be seen, when I sallied forth, and I was greatly disappointed, though I could not but admit that, under the circumstances, he would scarcely care to put himself very much in evidence. On my way home, however, I spied him in the distance, his skates slung over his arm, on his way to the lake. "O-o-o-h, Teddy!" I called, quickening my steps. He either did not, or pretended not to hear. Again I shouted—this time with such lung power that no one within a radius of two squares could ignore me. Instead of waiting for me, or turning back to



meet me, Teddy began to run as fast as his feet would carry him, in the opposite direction. This was the last straw. I never could care for him after that. For weeks we did not speak at all, and during that period my broken heart slowly mended itself, so neatly that, greatly to my surprise, there was no trace of the fracture. Our coldness, however, gradually wore away—one must speak to one's neighbors—and after the beginning of the winter term, I had been promoted to Teddy's class in school. The situation was an impossible one, and we began to speak, at first rather stiffly, but that soon wore off. My boyish friend was so pleased to be back, as he thought, in my good graces, that he became actually expansive and he confided to me that the beginning of all the trouble had been that some boys, who had seen us skating together, had teased him about me. This made him feel foolish and he thought that he would "show 'em" he didn't care for me, after all. And it was for this miserable piece of vanity that I had lost my friend, for lost he remained to me. I could never bring myself to revive the feeling I had once had for him. I could not but consider how differently the chivalrous Wilfred of Ivanhoe would have demeaned himself. *He* would have been proud to wear his lady's colors for all the world to see. Could I be satisfied with less devotion? I asked myself, and answered in the same breath—"Never!"



## CHAPTER XXII.

LENT had come, bringing to the "Stars of Bethlehem," (such was the fanciful title by which our class was known) no particular degree of solemnity. Miss Carson wore black on Sundays, however, and at the week-day services, too. It was very becoming to her. It was rumored also that she fasted on Fridays, but this I cannot vouch for. There had arisen something of a coolness between her and Arthur and they no longer shared the same hymn-book. No one knew the reason. Miss Carson seemed happy, in spite of the Lenten season, and she had an air of half-subdued importance and mystery that became almost excitement as Easter approached. Arthur, however, wore a countenance of steady gloom most appropriate to the season. I felt very sorry for him. It was said by some that he had proposed to our pretty teacher and had been refused. We small censors decided that, if this were the case, she must be a flirt, for she had certainly encouraged him; we could testify to that. Arthur, who had been a constant attendant at the Christmas carol practise, never came to sing with us for the



Easter carols. Miss Carson, on the contrary, was most assiduous in her attendance.

When Easter Sunday came—it was an unusually warm day for the time of the year—I thought that I had never seen any one so lovely as Miss Carson in her new spring attire. She wore silver-gray, with touches of delicate pink in her hat, and a wreath of small pink roses under the brim, rested on the pale gold of her hair. Her cheeks were as pink as her roses, her eyes shone, and she smiled on us very sweetly as she marshalled her little flock into the church for service. I thought that it must make Arthur very unhappy to see her looking so angelic, but beyond glancing up to say good-morning, he did not appear to notice her. She, on the contrary, stole frequent glances in his direction, and she seemed a little surprised, I thought. After the service she stopped and thanked us quite prettily—for singing so nicely, she said. She had her hand on my shoulder, and kept patting me and talking on about the service, and the carols, and the flowers in the church, looking about her a little restlessly. By and by Arthur passed us. I felt her hand grow unsteady ; she pressed me so close to her that I looked up quickly. She was not thinking of me, or of what she was saying. Her face paled a little as he passed our group with a ceremonious bow, and her fingers tightened. “Oh, Mr. Billings !” she called after him.



"Miss Carson?" He was standing, hat in hand, waiting, as though a little impatient.

"The children did so nicely, don't you think?—and I must tell you how good your boys have been at carol practice. I didn't think—well—they did wonderfully without their teacher." Her cheeks were not pink now, but scarlet.

"You are very kind, Miss Carson." Arthur had an air of lofty dignity that made me long to give him a push or a sly pinch—anything to disturb his equilibrium. "I trust they have not annoyed you in any way."

"Oh, dear no,—I looked after them—just a little—because you were not with them. They're such dear boys!" She gripped my shoulder very tight in her earnestness.

"Thank you,—you are more than kind. I am sure the boys appreciated your efforts. Good-morning, Miss Carson."

He was going; he did not ask to walk with her, as I was sure she had hoped. All her pretty color faded, and for a minute I thought she was going to cry. Then she rallied and talked to us brightly about a little party she was going to give us soon. We must cast a vote, she said, to determine whether it should be a day in the woods to gather spring flowers, or an afternoon spent in her home playing games and dancing.

I don't know why, but from that day I grew more and more fond of my pretty teacher. I had



always admired her ; she shone on me like some far-off, beautiful star ; but now I was growing to love her. I generally sat on her left in class. I began to be very punctual for fear of losing that place—and she used often to hold my hand in her little white grasp. Such a little hand it was ! and, as time went on, it seemed to grow even smaller. Her pretty rings turned loosely on her fingers, and it made me quite busy keeping the beautiful pearl and turquoises from hiding themselves inside of her fingers instead of staying where they belonged. Yes, she was losing her color, she was losing a little of her delicate beauty—that was becoming quite evident. People said that Eva Carson was “fading very young.”

If I liked Miss Carson better, I liked my old friend Arthur less and less. That surly dignity did not become him, but he kept it up, nevertheless. Miss Carson always spoke to him just as sweetly, though she never tried to draw him into conversation again. Her eyes were piteous sometimes when she looked at him. Were there no more knights of Ivanhoe left in the world, I wondered ? Did the race die out in King Richard's time ? Surely, Arthur was a fine fellow—Grandpapa had said so—and just as surely he was treating a very fair and sweet lady in a most discourteous manner.

After mature deliberation, we chose a day in the woods for our party. It was in early spring



and we longed to be out among the budding trees and to wander by a certain pebbly and noisy brook that the other girls had often visited. A stage took us to the outskirts of the town where "Carson's Woods" began—the tract belonged to Miss Eva's father and was always so styled—and then it was over the fence and hey for a run on the green moss starred with violets, blue and white, and dainty anemones. Our teacher spread a shawl on the grass under a tree and sat down, saying that she would read and wait for us there. She felt a little too tired to gather flowers just yet, she said, and indeed she looked so.

When I had picked a big bunch of flowers, I remembered her, and it seemed as though it was not quite nice for us all to go so far away ; so I stole back. She was sitting just as we had left her, with her fair head resting against the trunk of a tree and her book lying unopened in her lap. She looked so white, so transparent, so angelic, I thought, and her eyes turned a large startled glance towards me as I approached. I brought my bouquet as an offering. She accepted it graciously and, making room beside her, she asked me to sit down. At first we did not converse much, then she began to ask me questions about my Western home. I talked on eagerly and was in the midst of a recital of the delights of my grandfather's farm when she interrupted me.



"Was it there that you met Mr. Billings, Bessie?"

So I told her all about it. My mother had said to me that I must not tell Northport people about Arthur's visit and how it came about, so I first swore Miss Carson to secrecy. She sighed and smiled a little, assuring me that she would be the last one to talk about the subject. After I had finished she was silent for a time, stroking my hand, as she often did.

"He was—very nice to you and your little sister, then?" she asked at length.

"Ever so nice," I replied heartily. "I don't mind telling you, Miss Carson," I went on confidentially, "but *we* don't like him half so well as we used to. He's so—so *primpy* and stiff."

Miss Eva laughed softly. "Always, Bessie?"

"Well, not when he comes to our house." I had to own. "He plays with us and is just as funny, but I don't like him at church any more. I guess religion has a bad effect on him," I opined sagely.

"We used to be quite friends," said my teacher, still patting the hand she held, "but we're—not—any more. It isn't my fault, Bessie—at least—I think I was right—it didn't seem as if a church-woman ought to——"

She paused. I looked up and saw that her face was working convulsively and the tears had begun to run down her pale cheeks. The sight of



her grief cut me to the heart and such a big lump came in my throat that I couldn't say anything. For a moment I looked the other way and blinked my eyes to keep the tears back, and I squeezed Miss Carson's hand very hard.

"You're such a wise little thing, Bessie, or I wouldn't talk to you like this," she went on presently. "It seems as though I must tell some one. I've such an ache here all the time,"—she pressed her hand against her breast. "We were great friends, you know, and everything went well till,—well, it was the very first week in Lent that it happened. He was walking home with me from vespers and all at once he began to talk so—so differently from usual. And I let him go on, at first not seeing that he was going——"

"To propose," I added, as she paused.

Miss Carson looked astonished. "Why, how did you know, you little witch?" she asked.

"Why, every one thinks that," I said. "They all say that he proposed and you refused him."

"Well—I didn't—no, I really didn't, Bessie. I told him that I couldn't listen to him then. That when Easter came, he might speak about it, and he grew angry and said that I cared more for the Church than for him and that I must choose between him and the Church. I thought I was right—doesn't it seem so, Bessie?—We are told that in commemoration we must give up feasting and merry-making. It was my Lenten sacrifice, and



it has broken my heart. I thought he wouldn't stay angry, that he would come to me with the Easter lilies. Well, that is all over, and I can't bear it long. I'll not be here another Easter, Bessie."

We put our arms around each other and cried together, silently. The poor little frail figure seemed so small as, shaken by sobs, it leaned against mine. A passion of grief and pity swept over my soul, a determination to help this gentle creature who was dying for her love.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

THE sun was high in the heavens. We heard the shouts of the rest of the party as they strayed back in our direction, beginning to remember that the dinner hour was approaching and that we had a well-filled luncheon basket to explore.

"Let us go down to the brook, Bessie, and bathe our faces," said Miss Carson, rising to her feet. "They must not think that we have been crying. And Bessie, dear, you must make me a promise. Never, never tell anyone of this."

"Oh, *must* I, Miss Carson?" All my beautiful plans were spoiled, my air castle was in ruins. "Please don't make me promise."

"Indeed you must, dear," she replied firmly. "I should die of shame—I couldn't have anyone know of it. You shall be my little confidante. You must come often to see me and we shall be great friends, but—not a word of this to anyone."

I gave the required promise and she seemed satisfied.

The hamper was filled with all sorts of good things and ample justice was done to them. I didn't enjoy them so much as the others, though.



My pleasure was marred by the thought that my beautiful Miss Eva was in trouble and that I could not aid her—she had put it out of my power by insisting on that promise. People were always swearing me to secrecy, I thought discontentedly, though I really ought not to compare her to the burglar, I supposed. It would have been a very simple matter to tell Arthur of our conversation, He was not really cruel and he would have been sorry and everything would have gone well. But now how was I to help matters? Well, I must think out a way, and soon, too.

At sundown I reached home, tired and sun-burned—my hands filled with wilted wild flowers and my brain in a whirl with the importance of my new discovery. By a strange coincidence I found Arthur Billings there. He had stopped in and had been asked to stay to tea, as he often was.

What an opportunity it might have been, I thought.

“Well, here’s my little sweetheart Bess,” he exclaimed as I came in. “Got a kiss for me, Bess?”

“No,” I replied with some dignity. “I don’t care to kiss you, but I’ll shake hands.” I advanced and went through that performance with very little cordiality, it must be owned.

“Why this coldness?” asked Arthur in mock doleful tones. “What has your humble slave done to offend?”



"Don't be silly!" I replied, trying to withdraw my hand from his. How could he joke and be funny when that lovely girl's heart was breaking?

"Whisper it in my ear, Bess. Tell me what I've done and whatever it is, you cruel fair one, I'll instantly undo it."

I leaned close to his shoulder and whispered, "It is because *you* are cruel."

Arthur's face expressed nothing but surprise and amusement. "I give you my word, Bess, that I am soft-hearted to a fault. Who has maligned me?"

"I don't know what you mean with your long words," I replied crossly. "But you've made some one—some one that's sweet and good and a friend of yours—very unhappy and I think it's horrid of you."

Arthur's expression grew sombre at once. He understood me, I saw, although he affected not to do so. "You speak in riddles. May I not hear in plain English the cause of my fall from favor?"

That was exactly what I could not do and I doubted, from his manner, whether it would be of use, anyway. How stubborn he was! Grandpapa had noticed that, but he said that he had the making of a fine man, too.

My mother called to us to stop quarrelling and come to tea, and Arthur did not again give me



an opportunity to speak on the subject. He understood me well enough, and I thought that now perhaps he would be sorry and all would come a-right.

I did not see either Miss Carson or Arthur again until Sunday, but when I did, it needed only a glance to see that nothing was changed. He was still distant, she more drooping than ever. She had caught cold sitting on the grass in the woods, she told us, and thus explained her pallor and listlessness. During the week I went to see her, as she had asked me to do. It was late one afternoon and I was on my way from school. The servant who opened the door told me that she was ill and I waited, with fast-beating heart, to learn if she would see me.

“You can come into the library, please.”

I followed the maid to a very large, handsome room lined with books and family portraits. Although it was well on in May and a warm afternoon, a wood fire burned in the grate and very near it, with her slender hand held out to catch the warmth, was Miss Carson. She was lying in a reclining chair, dressed in a white wrapper with a great deal of delicate lace about her neck and wrists. She had grown startlingly thin in the few days since I had last seen her, and her eyes looked strangely large and bright.

“You dear child, how good of you to come!” she said, giving me her cheek to kiss. “I’ve



such a wretched cold, and I was lying here wishing that some one I like would come in. Bring a chair to the fire. I can't think why it stays so cold."

"It's ever so warm, Miss Carson," I said bluntly. "I guess I'll just stay over here by the table."

"Is it warm? I'm so cold," she gave a little shiver. "I haven't been well since our outing a week ago."

"Oh, Miss Carson, I wish you'd let me tell!" I burst out irrelevantly. But she understood me at once and a scarlet flush colored her cheeks.

"No, Bessie, never; how can you think I would permit it?"

"Well, he asked me and I couldn't tell anything, and if I could, it might have been all right again."

She raised up eagerly in her chair. "Asked about me, Bessie?" she queried. "What did he say?"

"N—o, he didn't ask about you exactly, but he asked *me* why I didn't like him any more."

Miss Carson smiled. She had settled back again in her half reclining attitude. "And you told him?"

"That I didn't like him because he was cruel—there!"

"Oh, Bessie, never say anything like that again. If he thought that I had told you—well, some



day it won't matter to me any more and then, then you may tell him. Tell him, Bessie, that I thought I was doing right, and that I never meant to make him suffer—as—he has made me." Her voice broke and she was silent.

I knew that she was thinking of death. Death! It gave me such a shuddering and I, too, drew near the fire. Oh, the pity of it! This pretty, tender creature that had never harmed a living thing, was going down into the cold, dark grave, and the only hand that could pluck her back was stubbornly withheld. It could not be—and yet—it must be.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

LAURIE was with us again, more than ever our big brother, so changed, so mature, so dignified. He was a publisher himself now—the youngest publisher in Chicago. Kitty and I were very proud of him. We liked to persuade him to take long walks with us—just to show him off to the admiring town. We were certain that every one must admire him. I thought him quite the handsomest man I had ever seen. That was many years ago, and, indeed, I think so still. The gray threads are beginning to streak my hair now, and soon I shall be as old as he ever was, once so old, so wise in my reverent eyes. The rest of us change, but he remains the same, unchanged and unchanging in the beautiful, eternal youth of one whom Death has early gathered. But that was years after.

The story of his struggles and of his success, problematic though it was still, was a topic of which we never wearied. I hung upon his words, and when his brief visit was ended and he was gone, he left a void too great to be filled. Everything else seemed so tame and spiritless after Laurie. I felt impatient with people who were



neither handsome nor brilliant. What right had they to cumber the earth?

I had almost forgotten Miss Carson while my brother was with us, but, on the day he left, some one told me that she was very ill. The time had come for me to act. I went to see her only to learn that she was too ill to see any one. I had neglected her. I had forgotten my duty and now she was ill, dying. I sat down for an instant on the doorstep after the door had closed. I wanted to think it out. I remembered my mother's saying that "A bad promise is better broken than kept." I would break it then—blame me who would.

It was very late in the afternoon when I reached the Billings' home. Mrs. Billings herself opened the door to my ring (it was often done in the old days at Northport), and she eyed me with some astonishment and, I thought, suspicion, when I asked to see Arthur. Arthur was dressing for supper, she thought. I told her, quite boldly, that I must see him—it was very important. I had been thinking all the way of the fine things I was to say to him, how I was to rebuke him, to rouse his conscience, but I forgot it all when he came into the room where I awaited him, and, after a word or two, I burst into tears like the foolish little girl that I was. He caught my errand from my first words, and his face grew pale and set, but when I faltered out it all—the whole story of the



poor girl's confidence, even to her last message to him—he gasped “God forgive me!” and was gone. He rushed from the house and I followed. I did not care for another interview with his stepmother, and, besides, my errand was done.

I was dreadfully downhearted that evening. Miss Carson was dying, Laurie was gone. I was even sad on Arthur's account, although I could but own that he didn't deserve it. He must be suffering dreadfully though, I thought, and the whole world seemed to me a dreary waste. Even the fact that it was a beautiful evening in early June seemed rather to accentuate the hollowness of everything. If I could only find a good place to go off and cry in! Once I should have sought the old stable, but I had never cared about lurking thereabouts late in the day since my encounter with Fancher. After supper I went out with the others to sit on the front steps. Everyone sat on the front steps on pleasant summer evenings in Northport. While the ladies of the family exchanged compliments and pieces of news with the ladies on the neighboring front steps, and the children played tag on the sidewalk, the head of the family, or the oldest boy (if he were sufficiently grown to be trusted with such a task), attached a long hose to the hydrant in front and sprinkled the roadway and the little border of lawn.

On that evening in June, Mrs. Langdon came



over to our steps, and the news that she was telling my mother seemed so interesting that Mrs. Tuttle, the neighbor from the other side, joined them. We were told to go and play. "Just as if I cared to listen!" I thought, indignantly, and I strolled off down the street. I was too tired and too miserable to play tag. What did it matter that Mrs. Langdon "had it" from Mrs. Rawson, who "had it" from some one else who was *there*—right on the spot? I shouldn't have really tried to listen, and they might have let me stay and rest my weary legs. Grown people just thought that children could always play and never get tired. By this time I had reached the Hankinsons' house. Mrs. Hankinson was not at home—she rarely was at home, being generally at church, or a sewing society, or a tea, or a sociable, or a fair, or, at any rate, visiting some one—and that was one reason which made their house such a desirable house to play in. Another reason was that it was very large and rambling, and that we did not have to be careful about "mussing things up," for they were already in that condition. The girls of my set were nearly all there, and they were playing a most interesting game. It consisted of tying a handkerchief to a string, putting it in a conspicuous place on the sidewalk and then jerking it suddenly back when the unwary passer-by stooped to pick it up. It was such fun that I



forgot my woes and laughed until my sides ached. We never should have got tired of it if one of the Flanagans, who lived by the canal, had not come by. He took the precaution to plant his foot firmly on the handkerchief, so that when we jerked, the string broke and Master Flanagan went off with the handkerchief. It was Cissie's handkerchief, with a "real embroidery initial" as she regretfully remarked, and she didn't care to play that game any more. It had rather taken the spirit out of the jest, any way, having the laugh transferred to the wrong side.

Then a bright idea struck Elinor Harwood. "Let's dress up in our mothers' clothes and go visiting."

"Oh, let's," I cried. "And then let's go down to the Flanagans' and pretend we're our mothers, and *make* Tom Flanagan give up that handkerchief."

This plan was received with delight, only we decided that it would take too long to go to our respective homes for costumes, so, instead, we would all dress up in Mrs. Hankinson's gowns. Fortunately for her wardrobe, that lady was wearing her best gown and bonnet, so that much escaped. Cissie, as I have said before, was a very mature-looking girl for her age. She was already quite as tall as her mother, and resembled her so closely that, when dressed in a



long black silk dress, with a bonnet and veil on, she might easily have passed for her. The rest of us were smaller—I was only eleven and small even for that age,—but we thought that, with Cissie in front, we might make a very good showing, especially as it was growing quite dark.

The Flanagans were ne'er-do-wells—most of them. The old woman took in washing and went out by the day to clean, the old man got drunk every day of his life, but was generally peaceable and quiet in his cups, therefore spent not more than three fourths of his time in the lockup or working with the chain gang on the streets. The eldest son was rarely at home. He had cut a man in a fight and had served a term in prison for the offense. He was also suspected of having been in league with a gang of burglars, but this had never been proved. However, he was apt to be from home most of the time on errands more or less mysterious. Then there were two grown daughters, saucy, slatternly, pretty girls, who occasionally worked in the mills, but for the most part lived on the money their old mother made at washing. Then came Tom, the present possessor of Cissie's handkerchief, an immature rowdy of fifteen or sixteen and, besides that, a host of smaller Flanagans.

After we had started, we began to realize that it was an undertaking requiring a good deal of courage to call at the Flanagans' in the evening,



but I bolstered up Cissie's failing spirit by assuring her that the old man would be sure to be asleep and that Jim Flanagan, the eldest son, had not been at home for a long time.

The Flanagan homestead stood close to the canal which ran through Northport. It was a large, tumble-down building originally intended to hold two families, but no one else had cared to share the domicile with the Flanagans and they had it all to themselves. They had only to take out the rags and newspaper with which most of the empty panes were stuffed in winter, to assure ventilation in plenty in the summer, and through the openings floated the voice of old Mrs. Flanagan, in dreary monotone. A single candle threw so feeble a light, that, peep as we would, we could see no one else in the room.

"Talking to herself!" whispered Carrie Crane with a giggle. We hadn't wanted to bring Carrie along. She was so very small and she limped. No one could mistake her. None of us, however, had the heart to tell her so, and she thought herself as well disguised as the rest of us.

"Sh!" commanded Cissie, from the doorstep. She gave a tremendous knock that brought forth no response save a smothered exclamation from within and a faint giggle or two from our little group behind her. She knocked again. This time the door opened very cautiously and Mrs. Flanagan's head appeared in a narrow opening.



“Good-evening, Mrs. Flanagan,” said Cissie in rather an artificial voice.

“Good-evenin’, Mrs. Hankinson,” was the reply, followed by a chorus of faint giggles from us. Cissie turned around and shook her head savagely.

“Mrs. Flanagan, I’ve come after my daughter’s handkerchief.”

“Handkerchief, is it? It’s yerself knows if I have a chance to take a handkerchief if I wud, and it’s yerself knows I wouldn’t take it if I cud. Wid you a-standing over me wash-tub an’ coun-tin’ ivery pace thot’s put in an’ ivery pace thot’s tuk out. I’d loike to know if ye think it’s possible, Mrs. Hankinson. An’ whot’s more, I’ll have the law of anny one thot ses I tuk annythin’. A pore, dacent, God-fearin’, law-abidin’ woman a-tryin’ her bist t’ arn a livin’ an’ thin t’ have ye spakin’ like that.” Mrs. Flanagan had grown so interested that by this time she had flung the door wide open and was standing, arms akimbo, on the sill. Back in the room we could dimly see the outlines of other figures. We were choking with laughter, pushing and nudging each other. This was even better fun than we had anticipated. “If I had a mon thot was any good in the wurd,” pursued Mrs. Flanagan louder and louder, “it’s himsilf thot wudn’t sit by an’ hear his wife insulted an’ blagguarded an’ if I had sons that wuz any hilp to their poor ould mither



I wudn't be washin' fer the loikes of ye, thot I wudn't.

"You are—you are—'way off, Mrs. Flanagan," retorted Cissie, with more dignity of manner than expression. "It's your son Tom has got my handkerchief, and I want it—I mean my daughter Cecilia's handkerchief."

Mrs. Flanagan had been eying our group suspiciously and with that, she made a dive for the nearest person, Carrie Crane. She missed poor Carrie, who dodged the attack, but reaching for a convenient broom, she sallied forth upon us shouting as she went. "Be off wid ye—here Tom, Jim, Jinnie, come here and ketch these young ones an' give 'em a good bastin'."

Our valiant group scattered and we fled wildly in opposite directions. I ran along the canal tow-path with my black gown held up in both hands and my bonnet dangling on my back. Footsteps were pursuing me. I ran faster and faster till my foot caught in a flounce of that unlucky dress and I fell headlong, with a wild cry, into the dark waters of the canal. As I struck the surface with a loud splash, my cry was repeated from the bank. Buoyed up by my long clothes, I did not immediately sink, and I could see on the tow-path, the figure of one of my companions. It was she from whom I had been running, and it was she whose voice now re-echoed my shrieks.



## CHAPTER XXV.

"OH, Bessie's drowned, Bessie's drowned," wailed Cissie, for it was she who stood watching my struggles. "Oh, Mr. Flanagan, we didn't mean any harm, *please* jump in and save her." A dark figure appeared beside her, tearing off its coat and kicking off its shoes. I saw it for an instant poised on the brink, then, for the first time, my head went under, a horrid gurgling was in my ears and my mouth, wide open for another scream, was filled with the filthy waters of the canal. I went down, down, down—fighting and struggling until a hand seized mine and I was drawn slowly, very slowly it seemed, to the surface. Once more I saw the sky, the banks of the canal. I must not go down again into those black depths, and I threw both arms about the neck of my rescuer, who began to swear horribly.

"Here, chuck me a rope!" he shouted. Again we went under. I made a despairing effort to cling to the form that seemed now to be trying to push me away. Then I lost consciousness for an instant, When I came to myself, I was still in the water, held at arm's length from



my preserver, who paddled a little with his disengaged hand while he still called for a rope.

The Flanagans were out in full force by this time, and other people were joining them, running from every direction. A rope was thrown us, and I and my rescuer, who seemed now almost too weak to cling to it, were drawn slowly out of the canal. Some one caught him by the hand and called him a brave fellow, though he tried to shake himself loose, and the others surrounded us. For the first time, by the light of the flickering lanterns, we saw each plainly and both of us started back. "The kid!" exclaimed the hero. I said nothing, but I knew his face at once. It was the face of my burglar.

"Here, lemme out o' this," he said. "D' ye want me to ketch my death?"

Instantly the rope was thrown over his head and drawn tightly about him, pinning his arms to his sides.

"No, ye don't, Mr. Fancher!" said Jim Flanagan, the holder of the rope. "Ye're worth too much money ter be let go."

There was a fierce struggle, the sounds of blows and of hoarse oaths that came through clenched teeth. In a few minutes it was over, and Fancher lay quiet, securely bound, panting and glaring like a wild animal caught in a trap. Over him stood Jim Flanagan, shrilly invoking the testimony of those about, that he and he alone



had caught the man for whom a reward was offered. No one noticed me ; I was completely overlooked in this new excitement. Painfully and clumsily I dragged myself to my feet—a most absurd little figure in my long bedraggled skirts. I pushed them aside till I was quite close to him.

“I never told on you, Mr. Fancher,” I said earnestly. “Really and truly I never did, and I’m very much obliged to you for saving my life.”

The trapped burglar said nothing. He only glared and panted.

“Oh, you must believe me !” I exclaimed, wringing my hands in my excitement. “Every one of these people will tell you that I never breathed a word.”

Fancher grinned a horrid grin. “Stow that, kiddy. You’re *square*, I guess.”

Some one who knew me got me by the hand and drew me away. I was conveyed home as quickly as possible and my punishment began in the shape of hot blankets and ginger tea—the night was very warm. My mother seemed hardly to know whether to weep for joy over my escape or for shame that I had been so mischievous. She finally seemed to make up her mind to enjoy my present safety and to reserve for the future the lecture that she knew it was her bounden duty to give me. It was very warm, I thought, as I lay, perspiring in state, in our spare bed, but I had a mind comparatively at rest. I say



comparatively, for what was the ruin of Mrs. Hankinson's second or third best gown and last winter's bonnet in comparison to the two secrets I had carried with me so long. And in one day I had rid myself of both of them. I had told Arthur, and the burglar was once more under lock and key.

As sleep stole over me, I wondered vaguely if Miss Carson would scold and if the sheriff would lock me up for aiding Fancher, and then—I was so weary that it didn't seem as though anything mattered very much and I floated off—after several convulsive starts and wild jumps down imaginary canal banks—into dreamland.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

THE first objects that greeted my eyes the next morning were Mrs. Hankinson's gown and hat, dried indeed, but looking sadly the worse for their experience. I think my mother must have laid them over a chair at the foot of my bed to give me a realizing sense of the damage I had thoughtlessly done. My head felt very dizzy as I sat up, the better to contemplate those ruins. They were hopelessly battered, it seemed to me, and, no doubt, I was the only girl who had really spoiled any of Mrs. Hankinson's wardrobe. Just my luck! It was as Cousin Alice had told me; I always managed to make myself conspicuous when I engaged in any pranks. Probably none of those girls would ever ask me to join them in any such undertaking again. Perhaps it was better so, and I should then be out of the way of temptation, but it wouldn't be pleasant to feel myself left out of all the fun.

The door opened cautiously and my mother peeped in. "Oh, you are awake, then," she said brightly. "Honora is bringing up your breakfast. Do you know that it is quite ten o'clock?"



Mamma sat down on the side of the bed and watched me as I silently ate my meal. I felt that she was thinking up what she was going to say to me after I had finished. Eating very slowly, I tried to make up satisfactory replies to the questions and the accusations I imagined that I should have to face. After I had deliberately finished the last crumb, mamma and I sat for a minute looking at each other, then she said, very seriously: "Have you anything to say to me, Bessie?"

I had so much that I hardly knew where to begin and so I told her. "It goes 'way back, mamma, ever so far. My head aches so I don't know how I shall ever tell it all in one day."

"Supposing that I help you a little? Who do you think has been here this morning to see your father about you?"

I felt my face growing red. "Mr. Hankinson?" I hazarded. Mamma shook her head. "Any of the Carsons?"

"Why, what have you been doing to the Carsons, Bess? I hope that there hasn't been anything more going on than I already know of? No, my child, Mr. Allen—Mr. Theodore Allen, has been here to talk about you. Do you know who he is?"

"A—a lawyer," I faltered.

"He is the District Attorney, and he came to ask your father to produce you in court as a wit-



ness against this man Fancher, when his trial comes on."

I gasped hysterically: "Oh, mamma, mamma, will they put me in prison? Oh, if he had only stayed away no one would ever have known!" Disjointedly, and bit by bit, I told my mother the whole story, beginning with my first meeting with Fancher and ending with my rescue by him the night before. Her troubled face gradually cleared as she listened and, after it was all over, and she put her arms about me, I wept away some of the heartache that had so long oppressed me.

"You can't imagine how relieved I am, my child," she said presently. "I did not know what to think when I was told that you had some connection with the escape of this man. No one can really blame you, be assured of that. It was only a mistake in judgment which some day I will explain to you. Of course your appearing in court will be very unpleasant and the notoriety of it all will be painful to us, but that is the worst. In this case, however mistaken you were, you did what you thought was right. I wonder if you could say the same of your conduct last night?"

"I didn't think at all," I confessed.

My mother smiled. "Well, that is honest, at least."

"Oh, mamma, *do* let's talk about something else, just for a little while," I entreated. "I'm



so tired of being miserable. I've had so much trouble lately. First Laurie went away and then Miss Carson's so awfully sick, and then the burglar and Mrs. Hankinson's dress."

"What a catalogue of woes!" laughed my mother. "I have seen older people than you who got tired of being miserable, It *is* tiresome, but it seems to be part of living."

"Well, anyhow, grown people don't have so much trouble. If they do anything like that nobody says a word to them."

"What, if a grown woman were to go to another woman's house and without leave or knowledge of the owner take her clothes and wear them and spoil them, do you think that no one would say or do anything about it?"

"Don't, *don't*, mamma!" I writhed before the contemplation of the picture thus held up to me. "The way you say it makes me feel just as if I was as bad as Mr. Fancher, and it wasn't really like that at all. Cissie was there, and she told us to."

"In that case, I suppose if Fancher can prove that some one told him to take Judge Sturgis's silver, it will be all right."

Overwhelmed by my mother's pitiless reasoning, I could only shed tears and exclaim that, in her place, I shouldn't try to make my child feel so wicked. This was apparently exactly what she did want to do, however, and, the result



being accomplished, she went on to give me some gleams of hope for the future. After having, so far as possible, restored Mrs. Hankinson's gown to its former state, we were to call upon that lady and confess and apologize. If she would allow us to get another hat in place of the one that had been spoiled, it should be done, and my pocket money withheld until it was paid for. I didn't care so much about anything as I did about the interview with her. That was indeed a punishment! However I found her very good-natured, and she laughed over the picture we had made until the tears stood in her eyes. Her enjoyment of the situation, and her intense curiosity to find out all about Fancher, made my misdeeds seem less heinous in my own eyes, though my mother rather deprecated such a view of the situation. Mrs. Hankinson would not listen to our proposition to replace the hat. It was a last winter's hat, and a cheap one at that, she said, and even now it would do quite nicely to give to poor old Mrs. Flanagan.

"She is a very comforting lady," I said to my mother as we walked home.

"She is very polite and kind, Bessie. She made light of the matter in order to spare our feelings, I suspect."



## CHAPTER XXVII.

FORTUNATELY for my mother's peace of mind, Northport had a new sensation, and I and my burglar were, for the time, somewhat forgotten. This latest subject for speculation and comment was the marriage of Eva Carson and Arthur Billings. They were married on the very day after I had sought Arthur and told him what I had learned, she lying on her death-bed, as it was thought. He wished to be near her, to have the right to be constantly at her side, and she seemed happy in the thought that, though dying, she would be his. Under such circumstances, the objections that would otherwise have been urged were forgotten, and the girl of eighteen and the boy of twenty were united. All sorts of wild stories were afloat concerning this romantic wedding. One (to which fact that Mrs. Arthur began slowly to recover gave some color) was that she had been secretly pining for love of him, and that finally, being on the point of death, she had confessed to her father that she was dying of an unrequited attachment, and that Mr. Carson had at once sent for Arthur and begged him to marry his daughter in order to save her life.



Arthur and his bride's family were kept busy for a time in giving to every one the real version of the story.

As soon as Mrs. Arthur was convalescent, which was some weeks after, she sent for me to go to see her. I thought that she would be lenient with me, and would not say very much about the promises that I had made her, and this turned out to be the case. She was very happy, she told me, and she had not forgotten nor never could forget that I had been her confidante in her troubles.

"Arthur—Mr. Billings was not to blame, though," she added, with a pretty little blush. "He really thought that I did not care for him, and, *of course*, he had too much delicacy to urge me. It was impossible for me to bring up the subject again myself, and so we both had all that misery to endure."

I privately thought that Arthur was very much to blame, but fortunately I had tact enough not to tell her that I considered that her husband's pride and stubbornness had made most of the trouble.

"We are too young, I know," she went on, "but we'll grow up together, and Mr. Billings is studying *very* hard to be admitted to the bar."

Arthur's studies must at that time have been most arduous. After breakfast, on his way down town, he stopped in just a minute at the



Carsons' to see how Mrs. Arthur was feeling. The minute lengthened out into an hour—sometimes two. At noon he went in to leave her a few flowers, or the latest book or magazine, was invited to dine, and generally accepted. He would not hurt the feelings of his parents-in-law by hurrying away immediately after the meal, and so remained a polite length of time afterwards. He was expected to take tea there every evening, and as Mrs. Arthur was still too weak to sit up late in the evening, he went to the house some time before the supper hour. Then, of course, when she was allowed to drive, Arthur must accompany her. If he *really* did study in those days, he must have done it when all the rest of the world was asleep.

Our Sunday-school class, with a substitute teacher, was far less interesting than when pretty Miss Eva had guided us along the right path. I developed a remarkable tendency to have headaches and toothaches on Sunday, which got better in the afternoon and had quite disappeared on Monday mornings, only to re-appear in more distressing form on the following Sunday. After a time, however, my mother began to disregard, in the most unfeeling manner, these distressing symptoms, and I had to do my duty in spite of my sufferings. I took little pride in learning my lessons—indeed none of us cared much about our scholarship, those hot July Sundays and there



was only enough religion left in our souls to appreciate a Sunday-school picnic. This festivity, relieved the monotony of the summer in a most unexpected way. It began just like any other Sunday-school picnic. Laden with a contribution towards the refreshments, we all met at a certain steamboat dock, embarked on a large boat, and, in an hour's time, found ourselves at the picnic grounds—a beautiful spot on the lake shore. Here were boats, swings, croquet grounds, green woods in which to wander, and a hard sandy beach where the heavy waves were rolling in. We forgot the heat and ran about trying to enjoy everything at once. We took off our shoes and stockings and waded in the shallows near the shore, running with wild shrieks when a big wave splashed us. It would have remained in my memory as a day altogether delightful, had it not been for an unlucky idea of Cissie Hankinson's.

“Let's play shipwreck,” said Cissie.

“Oh, yes, let's be Robinson Crusoe,” added Emma Fantucci. If we could only find a desert island to be wrecked on, it would be fun.”

I remembered that there was an island some four or five miles distant from the coast. “Don't you remember when we drew the map, it was just a little teeny dot quite near the shore?”

“But we don't know which way to row,” objected Elinor Hardwood.



“Right straight out, you goosie. We couldn’t miss it. Come on, girls, or we won’t get back in time for dinner. And Cissy, playing the part of commanding officer, marshalled us into a boat. How we ever got away without being observed, although the boats were at some little distance from the main pier, I don’t know. Get away we did, and borne by a favoring wind and current, we were only a black speck in the distance, by the time it occurred to our friends to look for us.

It must have been very tantalizing to the hungry picknickers to leave those well filled tables before the feast had even commenced in order to look for us—“the worst young ones in town,” as one old lady characterized us, right in the hearing of our distracted mothers. She said that she knew we were hiding about somewhere just to make an excitement, and that she for one, was not going to ruin her digestion by waiting so long past the proper hour for eating. So saying, she sat down, and it must be owned that her example found numerous followers. Not among the Hankinsons, or the Harwoods, or the Bentons however.

“I know my daughter well enough to be pretty sure she wouldn’t stay hiding long, with all those cakes on the table,” observed Mrs. Hankinson, “and I’m not going to sit down and eat my dinner while she’s drowning.”

My mother spoke to Arthur Billings (Kitty and



I were instructed to call him Mr. Billings now that he was married, though we often forgot), and he and several other young men started out to organize a searching party. At first no one noticed the missing boat, and it was some time before a small boy volunteered the information that he had seen us get into a boat and row off, but he had not stopped to see whether we came back or not, being interested in something else.

In the mean time we bold explorers were getting warm, tired, thirsty and hungry, and the desert island not yet in sight. To be sure we had the whole lake to drink from, but as there was nothing to dip it up in, that did us very little good. For a time Cissie and I took turns in rowing, always straight out towards the Canada shore, as far as we could judge. The water was rough and the pitching began to make Elinor seasick. We had broken one of the oars and lost another, so were reduced to one pair.

"Let's go home," said Cissie at length. Elinor had been for some time imploring us to turn back, although, as she said, she didn't feel hungry any more, and doubted if she ever would be, again.

We turned the boat about. But where was home? The distant blue line of the shore looked all alike. There was a cloud of smoke overhanging one point. That was probably Northport, we argued, and we headed our boat in that



direction. The wind had increased greatly since we set out, and rowing against it we could make no headway. Cissie and I each labored with one oar, while Elinor lay, miserably ill, in the bottom of the boat. Emma Fantucci did not know how to row and, although Cissie and I were each anxious to show her how, she absolutely refused to be taught. In fact she did not seem to care to do anything else but cry and complain that she was hungry.

At length, worn out with our exertions, our hands blistered and our faces on fire with the effects of wind and sun, we were forced to give up our feeble efforts. The smoky place that we had supposed to be Northport had long since faded from our sight; we had passed it without getting nearer, borne on by the relentless force of the wind. We could not even see the shore any more—a soft blue haze made a mirage-like coast in whatever direction we looked, and the wind had at last died away to a dead calm. The sun was sinking in the sky. Poor foolish children that we were, we said that the sun must be setting in the west but how were we to tell north and south? Even if we had known, we were too weary to make any further efforts and hungry and despairing we sat staring at each other silently. As night fell, and the stars one by one came out, we became very cold. Our thin summer dresses afforded us but scant protection and



even the faint breeze, so light as to scarcely stir the short locks upon our foreheads, made us shiver and shake. We had all cried till we were worn out, some of us openly and loudly, the others more or less furtively. There was nothing to be done—nothing but to wait for the morning and some passing boat. So, locked in each other's arms, we lay down in the bottom of the boat, lulled by the gentle rocking and the splash of the waves into a dreamless sleep.



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

A VIOLENT shock, a crash as of splintering wood and a hoarse shouting roused me from my sleep. My head was aching and stunned as if from a blow and, as I slowly sat up, I could scarcely realize where we were—out under the stars, drifting, drifting away from home and friends across that black expanse of water. It was even colder than before and my clothes seemed to be getting very wet ; the bottom of the boat was filling with water.

“What is it, oh, what is it ?” moaned Elinor. She was not cold. Her hand, as it grasped mine, was burning with fever and she appeared not to know what was going on about her. Near us was a black mass that towered far above us, a sail-boat about forty feet in length, with main-sail and jib set. A small lantern twinkled in the bow and behind it hovered a dark form manœuvring with an oar, or boat-hook. Some one was swearing dreadfully—apparently at us—for not displaying a light ; as if we could !

The owner of the choice vocabulary leaned over the side of the boat and held aloft another



lantern, as they approached us. "By——, Ben," he exclaimed, "it's a lot o' kids!"

Ben reached his boat-hook, and, grappling the side of our skiff, drew us towards them. Cissie stood up and caught the side of their boat, "Please, sir," she said with a little quaver in her voice, "won't you take us aboard. We're lost.

There was no immediate reply to this appeal but a whispered consultation between the two men, who seemed in some doubt as to whether they ought to take us in or not. The one called Ben, the younger of the two, was evidently in favor of doing so, but the other was opposed to it and in his earnestness he raised his voice from time to time. We overheard him say something about having to land in broad daylight. Finally he turned around and asked us gruffly where we belonged. We told him that we were from Northport, and, emboldened by so much favor, I assured him that our parents would be certain to pay them for their trouble if they would take us home.

"There now, Bill!" said the younger man, "you've got your chance now to turn an honest penny."

"Don't be a fool!" retorted Bill. "D' ye think I'd put into Northport in broad daylight with these things aboard an' it wouldn't do 'em no good if we got there in the night, if we could—which we couldn't—not with this wind."



"Our boat's leaking; you've jammed a hole in it and we'll be drowned. You'll have to take us in," rejoined Cissie firmly.

"So 't is, so 't is," said Ben peering over the side. "Lend a hand here, Bill—it's got to be done," and they lifted us, one by one, over the side of their boat. "Don't cry, sissy," he remarked soothingly, holding up Elinor, who seemed unable to stand. "Look at her hair, Bill," he went on, touching one of her golden curls. "Jest the color o' Jinnie's and she's jest about the age o' Jinnie—the age she would a' ben—"

"Don't be a fool!" interrupted the other, gruffly. "Here, I got to go below an' fix things up a little 'fore them kids kin go down," and he disappeared with his lantern into the cabin, carefully closing the hatch after him.

Ben was very kind to us. He wrapped his coat about Elinor and held her in his arms, and he found a cardigan jacket that he said the rest of us would have to wear in turn until he could make us comfortable in the cabin. Finding that we had had nothing to eat, he promised to make us a supper as soon as Bill came back to run the boat. "He's a-tidyin' up the place a little fer ye," he remarked explanatorily.

"I suppose you have your fish and your tackle down there?" I opined.

"Yes, that's it," he replied eagerly. "Got the



fish all out o' sight and smelling, Bill?" he asked, as the elder man reappeared.

"I guess it'll do, but you kids mustn't touch a thing, d'ye hear? I don't want my tackle and bait all out o' order."

We promised readily enough, and Ben took us down into the warm little cabin. It looked remarkably neat to me, as I gazed about me, and there was no odor of fish and no sign of fishing-tackle. One of the bunks was piled full of bales and parcels neatly done up, the other had been cleared for our occupancy, and Ben told us we should have to lie close, but that that was the best he could do. He brought out bread and butter, cheese, square chunks of cold pork and corned beef, and gave us some cold coffee to drink. It was the coarsest of food, and the coffee was so strong as to be bitter, but I think none of us had ever more thoroughly appreciated a meal. I am sure that I never did. Elinor could not eat, and this seemed to distress Ben greatly. "Wish t' I had a cup o' milk," he said. "Here, little dear, make a try at it, *do*. Eat jes' a little o' this nice bread and butter—jes' fer old Ben, now—come."

Thus adjured, she raised her heavy head and ate a few mouthfuls, but sank back soon and was wrapped in a sleep so deep that nothing roused her. Ben looked at her doubtfully, as he carefully laid her in the bunk. "I guess she'll be all



right to-morrow," he said. "Don't ye crowd her, now, will ye? Give the little 'un a chance."

Two of us had to lie on the floor; Emma and I offered to do so, and Cissie lay down beside her cousin. In spite of two oilskin coats as a mattress, and a cardigan jacket apiece for a pillow, we found our bed very hard, and I, excited by the strong coffee I had been drinking and the novelty of our situation, lay long awake. Ben had left the hatch a little open for ventilation, and the voices of the two men in earnest conversation floated down to my ears. At first they spoke very low, but as they gradually raised their voices, I gathered from their talk that they were discussing the best means of getting us ashore. What were these strange creatures, I wondered? Not simple fishermen, surely. Could they be pirates? A cold chill thrilled its way down my spine. I had not read so much about pirates as a small boy of my age would probably have done, but I knew enough of the presumable habits of pirates to be almost certain that Ben could not be a sailor under the black flag. And yet, what did such talk as the following signify?

"If we take them girls up to a dock at Northport the hull town 'll be swarmin' all over us 'fore we kin cast off. They'll all be wantin' ter *thank* us, 'n *shake hands* with us, 'n if we put out like that, *some* one 'll surely suspicion us. The cutter's there now, too. The hull gang 'll



be down on us 'for ye kin wink yer eye." So spoke Bill.

"We're in a hole, ole man," sighed Ben. "They ain't no doubt about that. Likes not we won't never git to the dock with 'em. Ef it wa'n't fer the *Perry* bein' in port, *I'd* say—chance it."

"Course ye would. You ain't got a fambly a dependin' on yer," growled Bill.

"'S if my nevvys and nieces warn't as much ter me as they be ter their father!" retorted the younger man. "You got no call to say that, Bill."

Bill seemed very cross. He argued and swore a great deal, and he especially cursed the luck that had led them to discover us and that had led us to make a voyage of discovery. "I've a good mind ter put 'em on their island 'n let em *stay* there," he said.

At length I fell into a troubled sleep, broken in upon at intervals by the talk of the two men and Elinor's moaning and occasional incoherent words. When I awakened at last, we seemed to be in the midst of a perfect uproar. The men were shouting from the deck of our boat to some one else more distant, and there was a roar of escaping steam. In the midst of the confusion, it seemed as though I recognized familiar voices. Slowly and stiffly I climbed to my feet, for I was lame and sore from the exposure. Emma was



awake and sitting up. "Where are we?" she asked.

"I don't know, but it's morning and I guess we've got somewhere. "Let's go out," and I led the way up the little ladder into the cold, gray dawn. There, bearing down upon us, was a small tug boat, and, standing on the deck, I recognized my dear father. With a shout of delight I stretched out my arms towards him, and, as our boats slowly drew together, I fell to weeping.

"Stand off there," shouted Bill. "Keep her off. Don't get any closer. Here, get them young 'uns up, Ben, an' put 'em aboard."

"We want ter git through this job 's quick as we kin," remarked Ben apologetically, as he passed us to the deck of the tug. "We want ter git t' work at our fishin' er we'll lose the best o' the day."

"That's so, my good fellow," said my father, "but you shan't lose anything by it. Throw us your rope and keep alongside till we can thank you as we ought."

"Oh, no thanks, sir, no thanks," said Ben hastily. Bill began hoisting sail to catch the light breeze that had risen, and, almost before we knew it, they had shoved off and were melting out of sight into the gray haze, leaving us open-mouthed and astonished on the deck of our little steamer.

"Well, I swan!" exclaimed our captain.



"That beats me! What they want to run off like that for?"

"Don't you see?" said one of the boatmen. "That was Bill an' Ben Struthers, sure. They caught a look at Cap'n Harwood here, an' the sight wan't good for their eyes."

Captain Harwood, Elinor's father, and an officer in the revenue service, was holding his daughter in his arms. "This shall be investigated," he said briefly. But I don't think that it ever was to any great extent. At any rate, though we were asked innumerable questions about the contents of the cabin and the appearance of the men, nothing ever came of it, and our smugglers—if smugglers they were—were never detected and punished. I, for one, was not sorry. It would have made me very unhappy to have had anything happen to big, good-natured Ben, who had so tenderly fed and cared for us as best he could on that dreary night.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

WE explorers had rather a bad time of it the rest of that summer. Our respective mothers were firmly convinced, each one that *her* child must be preserved from the pernicious influence of the other children. My mother was a long time in getting over the shock of that day and night of terror and anxiety. For weeks she was not herself, but grew nervous and hysterical whenever I was out of her sight. I was kept very much at home, and, of all my special friends, only Cissie came often to see me. Mrs. Hankinson simply could not stay at home, and so her children did very much as they pleased, as usual. Elinor was ill for some time after our voyage ; the exposure had proved too severe for her delicate constitution, so we saw her rarely, and Emma Fantucci was as carefully guarded as I was. It was reported that Mrs. Fantucci said *her* child should never associate again with those rough and mischievous girls. Cissie and I thought this rather unjust, especially as Emma had suggested the Robinson Crusoe idea to us.

Cissie had a ticket to the city circulating library, and she used to bring her books over to



my house. Together we devoured volume after volume, lying on the grass in the shade of our big plum trees. Mrs. Hankinson laid no restrictions on her daughter's choice, except as to books of adventure. "We've have had enough adventures in our family to last *one* while," she remarked.

We thought so, too. Our taste was all for romance and chivalry, now, We adored "The Children of the Abbey" and Miss Porter's "Scottish Chiefs." The fainting, blushing, weeping, languishing heroines seemed beings of superfine clay, and the terrible gloom of Jane Eyre's Rochester was far more effective in our eyes than the cheerful politeness we saw admired in the world about us.

My brother wrote me long letters, in which he exhorted me to read and study, He often sent me books and asked me to write my opinions of them and my criticisms, if I had any to make. He seemed particularly desirous to form my mind in the direction of intellectual rather than social pleasures, and he held out to me the hope of some day living with him, and being educated under his supervision, should his means permit. Laurie thought I was getting much too old, he wrote, to indulge in such pranks as had twice, of late, narrowly missed putting an end to my existence. I ought to begin to find my pleasure in other things than playing practical jokes and



romping like a small boy. And so I did, in fact. My latest adventure had had a very sobering effect on me. I was determined to do nothing again that should cause my family so much distress and myself such remorse.

Cissie quite agreed with me. She said that those other girls were much too young in their tastes for us, and that we alone knew how to appreciate the pleasures of intellect. The reaction that we both experienced was so great that our own mothers scarcely knew us. I am afraid that we were both very priggish and absurd, as well as being literary. Cissie's mind recovered its original tone first, however, and it all came about through Teddy Langdon.

Soon after we began our readings under the plum-tree, Teddy discovered us, and, after that, if he were anywhere about, we did but little reading. He began his attentions by throwing green apples over the fence at us, and by being very witty at my expense. He asked with a great appearance of interest, whether the burglar business was good now, and if I had any more friends in that line who were out of a job. It soon dawned on me, however, that these pleasantries were not intended to make an impression on me but on my companion, and, greatly to my surprise and disgust, I found that she was losing her interest in the readings and acquiring a decided interest in Teddy. As soon as this fact became



patent, I thought it my duty to point out to Cissie the worthlessness of Teddy's character. The only effect that this friendly office accomplished was to make Cissie accuse me of being jealous. Jealous of Teddy Langdon ! Words failed me in which to express my scorn at such an unworthy suspicion ; Cissie, quite unmoved, retorted that I had liked him well enough last winter—as every one knew.

“Last winter is very different from now,” I observed, with dignity. “I hope I know better now than to have such a boy as Teddy for my friend. I was only a little girl then.”

“Anyhow, he's the best skater in school,” said Cissie, “and my mother says he's the prettiest boy in town.”

“But he's so backward, Cissie. I thought *we* were going to give up people that didn't know as much as we did.”

“Oh, I wish you'd stop talking about Teddy. I don't care anything about him,” exclaimed my friend pettishly. “I'd rather read about Robert Bruce any day than talk to him, but I don't think it'd be very polite not to speak to him at all.”

I was simple-minded enough to be delighted with these professions and the next time I met Teddy, I explained to him the state of the case, and requested him, as courteously as possible, to abstain from interrupting our readings in the future.



“Oh, come off, Miss Primpy!” was the disrespectful reply. “You’re too smart for anything since you went into the burglar business.”

I was horribly sensitive on this subject and always preferred to retreat rather than to stand my ground when mention of it was brought up, and so I simply made a face at Teddy, quite in my old style, and went into the house. This impulsiveness of manner was a great source of mortification to me. Here I had been an entire month engaged in constructing a new character, with new manners to match, but occasionally they *would* slip off, like a garment that does not fit and leave me revealed—just my old self—and just a little girl after all.

I waited in vain for Cissie that afternoon. We were in the midst of Amanda’s fifteenth or sixteenth “scrape” (that was what we called them) and we had reluctantly left her without seeing how she got out of it. I went to the front door again and again and looked longingly up the street towards my friend’s home. Once I thought I saw her, but no—that could not be Cissie walking in the other direction, with a boy. I screwed up my near-sighted eyes and tried my best to make out whether it was or not; just then they turned a corner and were lost to sight. Mamma had told me that I was not to go out, as she herself was going to be away that afternoon, and she wished to know just where I was, she said



significantly. Kitty went with mamma. Honora was cross even if I had cared to condescend to talk to her which I didn't—very often. I looked over all our books, but I had already read them so many times that they quite failed to interest. Here was a pretty plight to be in, I thought, sulkily. What did my family expect of me? If it had not been for my reconstructed character, I must infallibly have got into some mischief, left so entirely to my own resources. At last the door-bell rang and I flew to welcome my friend only to find at the door—not Cissie, but one of her small brothers with a much-folded note from her, which he delivered and then took to his heels without waiting for a reply.

The note was brief and to the point. All it contained was, written in a very large hand—“Miss Bessie Benton, you are a *Tattle-Tale*.” And it was signed with many flourishes—“Cecilia Hankinson.”

What did it mean? I sat down on the stairs to think. Gradually a light dawned upon me. That was Cissie whom I had seen walking with a boy, and the boy, no doubt, was Teddy Langdon. He was telling her what I had said and she was telling him (doubtless) that she hadn't said anything, or didn't mean anything. “Very well,” I said firmly. “If she prefers Teddy's friendship to mine, she's welcome to it, but it's a blow to me to find her so false. I *wish* we could



have finished 'The Children of the Abbey' before this happened, though."

I had assured myself that I didn't care, and that she was welcome to change her mind ; nevertheless I couldn't keep myself from feeling very blue over it. Mamma and Kitty did not come home till supper-time and I had a long afternoon to brood over my wrongs and sorrows. They had been making calls—mamma driving in a top buggy with a very old white horse, whose only vice was a tendency to stumble or to go to sleep on the road—a rig she sometimes hired for such occasions. It had been a great event for Kitty. She talked so much at supper and gave such graphic accounts of all they had seen and done and heard, that my silence was not remarked. Only when we went out to sit on the steps in the twilight of the August evening, did mamma seem to notice my sadness. "Why don't you go after some of your friends, Bess?" she asked, patting me on the shoulder.

"I have no friends, mamma," I answered gloomily.



## CHAPTER XXX.

CISSIE and I never finished "The Children of the Abbey"; at least, we did not read any more of it together. When I told mamma about it, and represented to her the deprivation I felt it to be that I might not read the rest of the fascinating book, she said that she was glad of it—that it was not at all a suitable novel for a girl of my age. "It's a very silly story, anyway, Bess, as you will see some day, but now you will have to be satisfied with knowing that the heroine married the hero in spite of all obstacles. And I want you to promise me not to read any more romances at present—at least not without consulting me.

When I finally finished the book, years after, I was much surprised to find that my mother was right—that it *was* a very silly story. I have experienced many such surprises in my life. I have gone back to the old farm and found that the river was, after all, only a little creek; that the mountain in the distance was only a steep hill; that St. John's Church could be put, steeple and all, into the nave of Westminster Abbey; that my dear mother did not know quite everything;



that my father, as a violinist, was somewhat inferior to Ole Bull; that—but why go on? Every one of us can complete the parallel from his own experience.

Fortunately for the good of my health, mental and physical, the schools opened the week after my falling out with Cissie, and I was too busy to think quite all the time of the vanity of human hopes and the hollowness of friendship. I had contemplated writing a poem on this last subject, but never got beyond the first stanza—

“ Oh my friend, so shallow-hearted,  
 Oh companion, mine no more—  
 Oh the weary, weary waiting,  
 Waiting for thee at my door.”

The reader will doubtless observe a *slight* resemblance to certain lines in Locksley Hall—a poem that I was much given to reading in those first days of deception and disappointment. Cissie and Teddy were well nigh inseparable. They paraded their friendship up and down before my windows, while I masked my feelings under an exterior of stony calm—at least that is what I called it to myself. *They* called it something different, I believe—said that I looked out and turned my nose up at them—or something equally vulgar. As I have said, it was fortunately time for school, and I had to readjust myself to habits of daily mental work, which I



found difficult, at first, after the long, idle summer. Kitty was put in school, too, in the lowest class in the same building, and I had to take her with me every morning and see that she went safely home every afternoon. I made it my business to look after her a little at recess, too, and see that no one teased or bullied her. So much responsibility steadied me a little, and I began to forget some of my romantic fancies and to take an interest in every-day affairs.

Just at this period Fancher's trial came up, and I had to get leave to absent myself to face this dreaded ordeal. It did not last long, however. I was spared the necessity of being put on the witness stand by the burglar himself. By the advice of his lawyer, he pleaded guilty, and, as he was able to make full restitution of the stolen goods (they were all buried in a lonely spot near the canal), he was let off with a light sentence. The fact that he had left the booty he had come back to seek, and plunged into the water to save my life, was a point very much in his favor, and one of which the most was made. My father made an appeal, in which he said that there was an element of courage and self-sacrifice hidden under all that was depraved and vicious in the man's nature, and that it behooved society to correct and to reform rather than to punish.

Fancher, on his side, insisted on making a speech, much against the will of his lawyer. He



frequently referred to me in a way that overwhelmed me with embarrassment, and he said that I was "the squarest kid" he ever met. With deep feeling, he went on to state that it made a fellow believe "in things" (indefinite, but he seemed to know what he meant) to see a "little toad like that so *straight* and true." What he deprecated, however, apparently with perfect honesty, was that so much fuss should be made about rescuing me. "I could of walked ashore by meself," he said, and this reminded him of the absurd view that society and the law took of "things." He said that if a man did anything like that people made fuss enough to "make him sick," and he thought they were just as absurd in the opposite way if he did anything against the law. Here his counsel pulled him down to a sitting position and succeeded in stopping the flow of his eloquence. It would have been interesting, though, to have learned just what Mr. Fancher thought of the law. He seemed pleased at his sentence of three years, however, so perhaps he did not consider that society's view of his case was altogether wrong.

Accompanied by my mother, I went to say good-bye to Fancher. I privately hoped that it was a final parting. We took him some good books and plenty of good advice. By the expression of his face, I fancied that he cared as little for one as for the other, but he was too in-



timidated by my mother's appearance and bearing to say anything of the sort. I had suggested taking him something nice to eat, but, on this question my mother was firm. She did not believe in pampering criminals, she said, and when my father confessed to having sent him some tobacco, she seemed very much put out.

And so *exit* Fancher. In my life he appeared no more. I wish that I could record that he served his term, which was shortened for good conduct, and emerged from prison resolved to lead a better life, that he worked his way out from his miserable past, that he became a useful citizen, an ornament to the community and a pillar of the church. Perhaps, according to his lights, he was indeed a reformed character, and it is possible that he pointed with pride to his later achievements and held out to the young men who frequented his bar the hope of arising to the proud eminence to which he had climbed. He opened a saloon in a neighboring city, which became a resort for the worst characters thereabouts, but, up to the present writing, Fancher himself has never re-appeared in a court of justice, except to answer from time to time for a violation of the excise laws, or to appear as a witness in the trial of some *habitué* of his place.

Outside of school hours I now began to indulge my literary tastes as my leisure would permit.



Under my mother's supervision I read a great deal—history and poetry now being my favorite themes. At this time I cherished the ambition of one day being a poetess whose fame should be world-wide. I thought it would be a great thing for Laurie to have a member of his family to contribute to his paper without money and without price, and I forwarded to him a budget of poems to be used as occasion required. Some of them were patriotic, some sentimental. The patriotic ones were chiefly inspired by the plans which were already being made for a Centennial Exposition. I remember one of them which began—

“ A hundred years has my country seen  
And 'tis, as ever, fresh and green,  
And centuries more may the noble nation  
Retain its great and glorious station,” etc.

Greatly to my disappointment, however, Laurie did not print any of these poems. He suggested that the best ones sounded so like some things that had already been published, and that the others were rather lacking in finish. He thought that it would be better to let them lie awhile before attempting to correct these defects, and then perhaps I should see more clearly just what they needed. And so my first manuscript came home as “not available.”

My mother had endeavored to prepare me for



the disappointment by telling me of the early struggles of authors and of their thankfulness, when their talents were matured, that their earlier and cruder works had never seen the light. But what young person is ever prepared for disappointment? They always fancy that their case is to be the great exception which proves the rule.



## CHAPTER XXXI.

A WAVE of religious revival was sweeping over the whole country and its force was strongly felt in Northport. We did not have Moody and Sankey there, but we had our local revivalists who modelled themselves after them and used their set phrases and sang their songs. As I have said, we were church people, and so this readjustment of beliefs and practices did not touch us very closely. We often went to the meetings, but it was rather to look and listen than to participate. I privately thought them very amusing and it is barely possible that my parents did, too, although they were careful never to let it appear. All the town drunkards and the "shocking examples" came forth, were prayed over, reclaimed and became, at least for a time, the edification of the meetings. They all made speeches and told how wicked they used to be ; they vied with each other in their revelations of the depths to which they had sunk. The one who could tell the worst story was looked upon with some degree of envy by his companions. To me, a little Episcopalian, with ears trained to the grand and sonorous roll of words that even a poor elocutionist cannot spoil, these speeches were simply ludicrous. I was too young to feel



the real earnestness which underlay the halting words, and I could not see why people who spoke so badly should wish to speak so much. Jim Flanagan was chief among the sinners who repented, and the bowed figure of his poor old mother, wrapped in her threadbare shawl, was nearly always to be seen on one of the front seats listening to the eloquence of her "bye." Her old head, crowned by a bonnet on which waved three wild and defiant ostrich feathers, quite out of curl, used to wag mournfully as Jim told of his misdeeds and her toil-hardened fingers furtively brushed tears from her eyes when he told of the man he was going to be, "s' help" him God. She did not quite approve of the meetings, being herself a devout Catholic, but she was not insensible to the fame and the substantial help which her son's "change of heart" brought him.

The leading evangelist was a little, red-faced man, with a stentorian voice and a collection of cut-and-dried sentiments and phrases. He called every one "Brother." He led out each speech-making sinner by the hand and slapped him on the back to give him courage. If the speech faltered a little or the speaker got into a tight place he was ever ready to come to the rescue, with a fervent "Bless the Lord!" or "That's so, brother!" an "Amen!" or a "Hallelujah!" He was always talking about burning bridges behind him and keeping his lower lights a-burn-



ing—whatever he meant by that ; I never could be quite sure. I asked Mrs. Arthur Billings, who was once more our spiritual director, to explain, but she was very reserved on the subject and only said that she did not go to the meetings. She would express no opinion of them to us, though I heard her tell my mother that she supposed that they did some good, but that they were very shocking to her. Mrs. Arthur was not quite the oracle she had been to me a year before, though I still had great respect for her opinion. I was glad to see, too, that time was modifying some of her views and she had ceased to be quite so High Church as she used to be.

As the winter went on and the meetings somewhat lost their first interest for us, I, and most of the girls of my acquaintance, began rehearsing for an operetta to be given for the benefit of the public-school music-master, whose business it was to teach a few of the elementary principles of vocal art. It must be admitted that the poor man earned a benefit, if ever any one did. He worked himself to a shadow over his fairy operetta, introducing some “gems” of his own composition, and he had rather more than he could manage to reduce his self-willed artists and his turbulent chorus to something like order and unanimity. To us the rehearsals were simple “fun,” especially after we got far enough along to have them in the Opera House. Now that I



am no more young, I can understand the earnestness, the weariness of some of those poor people whose lot in life it is to train exuberant youth. Their tired faces, their nervous ways meet with scant sympathy from the young and yet—how really pitiable after all is their fate, unless they be strong—strong enough to dominate those under their charge. Poor Mr. Williams was very far from being equal to the situation and his constant appeals received little attention. “Young ladies, young ladies, *please* pay attention.” “Young ladies, no talking, *please*,” he used to iterate and reiterate, drawling out the “please” as though he were on the verge of tears.

My voice was strong and true and, besides singing in the chorus, I had a small—a very small—solo allotted to me. I was to be one of several fairies, who in turn tripped down to the front of the stage, waved their wands and sang a couplet about spring having returned, and expressing their joy that they could once more dance upon the green. We had great difficulty in appearing light and airy enough; some ran, some pranced and some clattered down the stage in anything but a fairy-like manner. Mr. Williams, when we came to this part, used to fairly tear his hair at the noise we made, and he always began to clap his hands together vigorously and exclaim “Now, trip, *trip*, TRIP!” as we stamped down to the front. One of our number, Lucy Carr, a large



heavy girl, chosen on account of her beautiful voice, was particularly exasperating to the music-master, and his "trip, *trip*, TRIP" rose almost to a shriek when her turn came. One afternoon, as Lucy stumbled out from our group and started to the front, Mr. Williams began his "Why *don't* you trip, trip, trip?" Trip she did, and fell flat on her face, to our great joy and our leader's despair. We shouted with laughter, in spite of Mr. Williams' "Now, young ladies, young ladies, how can you be so rude?" The coincidence did not seem to strike him as at all humorous and, in spite of our giggling every time he did it, he said the same thing whenever we came to that part of the play.

For some unexplained reason, one of the plainest girls in town had been selected for the character who, by her pride, offends the fairies and brings their vengeance upon her. She had to toss her head in a manner supposed to indicate great haughtiness and dance about singing:

"I'm rich, I'm gay, I'm dashing,  
I know that I'm handsome."

When she made this statement we always giggled, and Mr. Williams frowned fiercely at us and shook his head. Then we came on in a troop with long loose brown cloaks over our stiff tarleton skirts. We approached the haughty beauty and asked alms. She spurned us with scorn, not



noticing the white shoes which peeped beneath our cloaks, although some of them, at least, were very noticeable. Then we tried begging of a poor flower-girl, who, instead of giving us anything, sang a very long song, in which she told her entire family history and the misfortunes which had overtaken her, expressing her regret in the last stanza that she had nothing to give. Meantime the haughty one walked about, tossing her head to express her scorn of the poor flower-girl and of us. Thereupon the fairy queen waved her wand and threw off her cloak—we all threw off our cloaks, and the beauty and the flower-girl struck attitudes expressive of consternation. The indignant queen then tapped the two mortals with her wand and told them that they were to change places for life. After some little hesitation and difficulty, the clothes of each one dropped away, revealing them in their changed estate—the beauty in rags, the flower-girl in a cotton-velvet gown, gay with tinsel trimmings. The flower-girl managed the transformation very well, as her rags hung loosely over the gown beneath, but the haughty one had a dreadful time of it at the dress rehearsal, and finally had to be assisted out of her good clothes. She assured Mr. Williams that all would be as it should at the performance, however, and he was unwise enough to believe her.

On the night of the public performance all



went well until this scene was reached, but the beauty wrestled in vain with her fine garments, while the queen, in response to a tap from the conductor's baton, sang over again her curse. The flower-girl, long since transformed, stood staring and uncomfortable, not daring to fall on her knees to bless the queen until the beauty was ready. The audience began to realize the situation and tittered a little. This so upset the beauty that she made a frantic effort and then said in audible tones, "I can't unhook it," and gave up the attempt. The flower-girl promptly fell on her knees and finished up her part of the scene, but the haughty beauty stood still and silent—a picture of despair—and utterly refused to sing her plea for mercy. The curtain fell amid shouts of laughter from the gallery and loud applause from the friends of the players in the orchestra chairs.

Mr. Williams was in a frenzy. "You've ruined the whole thing with your hooks and eyes," he said to the weeping beauty. "I'll go home!" retorted the beauty. "You'd better, before you spoil anything else," rejoined the music-master. "I'll tell my mother what you said, and she won't let me take any more piano lessons of you." Thus the beauty.

Piano lessons meant bread and butter to the teacher, who received only a small salary for his work in the public schools. His wrath immedi-



ately cooled, and he did his best to soothe the beauty before another act should begin. She finally allowed herself to be pacified, and, as she was to be a fairy in the back row of the chorus in the second act, she was at last persuaded to go on again.

In this act I sang my solo in a "still, small voice," which must have penetrated quite to the footlights on some of the high notes, but I tripped, tripped, tripped, and didn't do anything awkward, so I had much to be thankful for, even if I achieved no great distinction. Afterwards I had my picture taken in my fairy costume, gauzy wings, star-tipped wand and all, standing very stiff and solemn beside a broken column, with a vine-wreathed ruin and some rocks in the distance.

The rest of the operetta went smoothly, and Mr. Williams made us a little speech after it was over, in which he expressed himself as extremely gratified by the performance. He looked anything but gratified as he stood twisting his nervous fingers and rumpling his hair, in fact I have rarely seen a more worn-out and dejected-looking countenance. It is to be hoped that the box-office receipts went a little way towards making him happy. They were unusually good, thanks to the fact that he had every little girl in the town in the piece, and consequently every family who possessed a young daughter as interested spectators.



## CHAPTER XXXII.

As the winter advanced, the revival meetings were less crowded. Some of the repentant sinners had back-slidden or were on the point of so doing. Jim Flanagan, having made the most of his brief period of notoriety, and absorbed all the suits of clothes and other trifles that were showered on him by benevolent Christians, had gone back to his old habits. That spring one of the commonest topics of conversation was whether So-and-So had kept the pledge he had taken and how Such-a-One had relapsed into his former misdoing. By summer scarcely one of the penitent ones was still penitent. Most of them were engaged in laying up a fresh record to be sorry for.

The operetta had given us all more or less of a taste for theatricals, and I could think of no greater treat to bestow on my mother on her birthday than to get up something of the sort for her amusement. My first idea was to play the "School for Scandal," having recently been taken to see that play, with Mrs. D. P. Bowers as Lady Teazle. I soon gave this up, however, owing to the difficulty of getting together a suitable cast. We finally concluded to content ourselves with a



series of tableaux and some charades. One of the tableaux was entitled "The Drunkard's Family." I, of course, was the drunkard (I had to be the principal character in everything). Enveloped in an old coat of my father's, with a battered felt hat drawn very much over one eye, I sat by a small kitchen-table, on which stood an array of bottles—catsup, vinegar, alcohol, and strawberry shrub—enough of a combination to make even a drunkard's hair stand on end. I had a glass of weak shrub and water in one hand and a burnt-cork moustache adorned my chubby and befloured countenance. My nose was as red as a petal from an artificial rose could make it, and I had painted large hollows about my eyes and in the middle of each cheek, as the stage directions indicated. These were mistaken for bruises by the audience. On a heap of old clothes in the background lay Kitty, the drunkard's child, also liberally plastered with flour and burnt cork. Much against my better judgment, I had been obliged to paint a red nose on her cherubic face. She insisted on it. She said that mine looked so funny and that she would not play unless she could have red on her nose, too. The drunkard's wife, Cissie Hankinson, attired in ragged garments, reclined on a heap of hay, her hair hanging loose about her shoulders, voraciously devouring a crust—this was her idea, and I thought it very good.



To our great surprise, this pathetic picture was received by our assembled families and their neighbors with roars of laughter. Teddy Langdon, who had a front seat, called out, "Been givin' the little 'un a drink out of the ketchup bottle?" And some one else in the rear of the room asked, "Why don't you give the child some bread?" and another suggested, "Give your wife a chair." We were so hurt by this reception that we refused the encore which was loudly demanded.

"I don't believe they would have laughed at all if it hadn't been for your red nose, Kitty," I said, much aggrieved. "I'm *sure* Cissie and I weren't funny."

"Boys always make fun of everything," remarked Cissie philosophically. They'd make fun of a funeral."

"Yes, they would. Jack Jessup said he had lots of fun at his grandpa's funeral," put in Kitty eagerly.

"Jack Jessup is a very bad little boy," I said didactically. "The perfect idea of such a thing! It is just disrespectful."

None of us appeared in the next scene which was entitled "The Light of Other Days." It consisted of a lighted candle standing on the drunkard's kitchen table. This was received with great applause and we felt somewhat encouraged. Our next number was a musical one, a waltz, played by Cissie. This also was kindly received,



in spite of the fact that she twice broke down and began all over again. Next came "St. Agnes at the Stake"—Kitty in a long white robe that looked suspiciously like a nightgown. We had nailed two boards together in the form of a cross and tied her to it in a kneeling position, with bunches of patent kindling neatly arranged about her. Her hands were clasped in prayer, her long curls floated loosely over her shoulders and her great innocent brown eyes were raised heavenward in a way that would have melted the heart of the most hardened executioner. This tableau had a tremendous success and we were obliged to repeat it three times. Fearing that it would leave too painful an impression on our audience, we had prepared another to follow it, which we playfully entitled "*Rebecca at the Steak.*" This was simply a small girl pounding vigorously on a very little piece of meat. The audience did not quite understand it at first, but when they did, it also received a round of applause.

Our program being terminated, we actors mixed affably with the company and joined them in partaking of nuts and apples, cider and cake. My mother thanked us and assured us that she had not in many years so greatly enjoyed a birthday. Of course, the boys made fun of us, but we didn't mind that any more. It was on that evening that Cissie confided to me how badly she had been treated by Teddy. I was, naturally,



deeply interested, and highly gratified by being chosen as a confidant.

"I wouldn't tell any one else for the world," said Cissie pathetically, "but you know what Teddy Langdon is."

With great difficulty I refrained from saying "I told you so last summer." Instead, however, I only asked what he had done.

"He wrote me a note in school and passed it over without anybody catching him. He pretended he wanted to get a drink, you know, and when he went by my desk, he just dropped it right in my lap."

"What was in the note?" I asked eagerly.

Cissie blushed a little. "Oh, a whole lot of stuff. I wouldn't like to tell all the silly things he said, but at the end of it he asked me to go skating with him. Well, then I wrote back and told him 'Yes' and then I went for a drink of water. I s'pose Miss Ketcham thought it was queer I walked 'way over by the boys' side so—any way she was watching, and the minute I dropped my note on Teddy's desk, she said—awful loud—"Theodore! bring that note to me." Teddy just took it and slung it out into the aisle, but she made him bring it right up to her and she read it and just grinned that horrid way she has. I thought I'd die!"

"What did Teddy do?" I inquired sympathetically.



"That's the worst part of it. He was just as mad to be caught that way, and he up-ed and said he never wrote to me at all and that I was always writing him notes."

"O-o-oh!" I exclaimed indignantly.

"Yes, and I got out his note and a lot of others I had from him and started up to Miss Ketcham with 'em and he just flew at me and tried to get 'em away and was perfectly wild, he was so mad."

"I just wish I'd been there. I'd a-helped get the best of Mr. Teddy."

"It was while you were down in the German class, you know. Any way, Miss Ketcham said she didn't want to read any more such silly nonsense and she'd take my word for it, but if she caught either of us writing again she'd tell the Principal. Oh, I nearly sank through the floor. It just seems to me as if I never wanted to have another beau again."

"That's just the way I feel," I said solemnly. "After Teddy treated me so mean last winter, I just made up my mind that I'd never, never care for any one again that way, and I never have. That's a whole year, too."

I could see that such fortitude surprised Cissie. "Let's go skating all by ourselves, and never mind the boys," I added.

Cissie agreed to this, although it was evident that she did not regard the prospect as particularly gay.



It was a very cold winter and we skated a great deal. Coasting I had almost entirely given up, thinking myself too old for that sport—I was nearly twelve—and the only use I put my sled to was to draw Kitty to and from school occasionally, when the snow was deep. Coasting on the Jessups' big bob sled was an altogether different matter, and Cissie, Emma Fantucci and I used often to accept such invitations from the Jessup boys. Knowing my mother's objections to bobs, I forgot to say anything about these parties until the day when we ran into a farmer's sleigh and upset him. He was bringing a box of limed eggs to market and the collision was bad for the eggs. The eggs would have been bad for the consumers, if we had not intervened, but the farmer did not regard it in that light and made us pay a round price for them. We were not much hurt, only a trifle bruised and shaken up, and we agreed among ourselves that nothing should be said on the subject. The next morning however, there appeared an account of the accident in the newspaper, giving our names and adding that we were all badly hurt. My mother's face was a study, as papa read aloud this highly interesting article.

"*Are* you hurt, Bessie?" she asked. "No? Well," she went on, after a slight pause, speaking very slowly, "I had a letter from Laurence last week and a great part of this letter was about



you. I did not tell you about it because your father and I had to talk it over a little. Now, your brother is doing very well, and he thinks that, by next year, he will be able to take you with him and put you in a boarding-school where he can see you two or three times a week. He thinks that it would have a good effect on you and I am inclined to agree with him that it would."

"Oh, mamma!" I exclaimed jumping up from the table in my delight, "how perfectly lovely! Oh, *can* I go?"

My mother looked deeply hurt. "Would you be so glad as that to leave us, Bess?"

I threw my arms about her neck. "No, you dear, darling mother, but it would be such fun to go to a boarding-school, and I could come home Christmas and Easter and all the long summer. O, O, Oh!" I started to waltz around the room.

Papa squinted up his eyes a little and looked after me. "If she regards it entirely from that standpoint, she might as well stay here," he said.

I stopped dancing, "But I don't, papa," I said coaxingly. "I know it'll be just the greatest chance for me to study hard and I never got on very well at the public schools, you know. Say, *can* I?"

"There's plenty of time to talk about that," rejoined my father. "In the mean time—no more coasting, and try not to drive your mother crazy with your pranks."



## CHAPTER XXXIII.

"O HENRY, we'll *have* to send that child to boarding-school ! She's got a whole box full of the absurdest notes from that Jessup boy." Thus my mother in despairing tones.

Papa chuckled a little. "Well, Louise, don't take it so to heart. Didn't you use to have little sweethearts when you were Bessie's age ? "

"I wish my daughters to do very much better than their mother," was mamma's evasive reply.

"I don't think they could be better women than their mother, Lou."

Hereupon, I walked into the parlor. "I couldn't help hearing you, mamma," I said, "and I want to explain to you that Harry Jessup isn't just an ordinary boy. I s'pose those notes seem silly to you—that kind of talk always does seem silly to an outside party."

Here my father began to laugh, but mamma checked him with a reproachful look. "Why, Bessie," she said in a grieved tone, "do you call your own mother an outside party ? "

"Well—yes, mamma, as far as Harry is concerned, you are. I think I ought to tell you that he is a very remarkable boy. It is his character



that I admire most in Harry. It isn't like it was with Teddy Langdon."

"Oh, it's not the same as with Teddy," echoed my mother.

"No, and Harry is just a splendid fellow—all the other boys think so. He wouldn't cheat and tell stories for anything, like some of them, and he *never* tells on anybody. And he's ever and ever so much older than I am—'most three years." I blushed a little here, but nerved myself to go on firmly. "I don't think you ought to feel so about seeing me fond of a boy that you wouldn't mind having me get engaged to, when I'm old enough."

"Bessie Benton! I am glad you have the grace to blush, at least," said my mother severely. I think papa wanted very much to laugh, his eyes twinkled just as they did when he was amused, but he only said, quite seriously—

"Now, Bessie, that will do. You are too young for such ideas as that. Enjoy your friend's society, but don't have any more of that mawkish sentiment."

I went out, quite crestfallen, feeling very small and young and very much out of favor with my mother. I even debated with myself whether I should not give Harry up rather than make her feel so badly, but no, I told myself that such a course would be very weak. My favorite heroines never gave up; they were polite but firm with their parents and resolute always against adverse fate.



At recess that day I told my friend all about the conversation, leaving out only what I had said about being engaged.

"By jiminy! did she read 'em all, Bess? Whew!" he gave a long whistle and looked very rueful.

I nodded my head vigorously. "I guess so—anyway she said that they were the 'absurdest notes'—those were her very words. But you know I don't think so, Harry," I hastened to add, fearing that my candor had hurt his feelings.

"Well, I just can't look your mother in the face after that. Oh, Bess, why didn't you tear 'em up? I did all yours."

While feeling grateful that Mrs. Jessup would have no such literary feast as my mother had enjoyed, I was at the same time somewhat hurt by Harry's lack of sentiment. He should have treasured those notes, I thought.

The bell rang and we said good-bye hastily and went off in opposite directions, for Harry was two divisions ahead of me and was to go into the High School in a few days. After school I found him awaiting me, as usual, and we walked on rather soberly together. "Let's go the longest way 'round, Bess," he suggested. "I can't go up to your house for a while now—till your mother gets over those notes."

I consented readily enough, and we went a very long way around, indeed. It was a warm day



in early April, and, after a two days' rain, the sky was clearing in the west. A beautiful golden light shone through the steam-like haze arising from the moist earth. The roads were deep in mud and the walking was dreadful. Harry gallantly helped me over the worst places, greatly to the detriment of his shoes.

"I shouldn't wonder if they sent me away to school, Harry," I said, at length, "but not before next fall."

"Bessie, give me your hand."

I pulled off my woollen glove, and looking hastily about to see that no one was in sight, I did as I was asked. We were on the very outskirts of the town, standing in the mud under the leafless trees, and the rough wind tossed and tumbled the hair about my face. I looked up into my friend's honest eyes as his strong fingers closed over mine with a tight grip.

"Bessie, let's promise never to forget each other, no matter what any one says or does."

It was a solemn moment, and I felt a thrill, half of dread, half of excitement, at such a bold step. But I promised, and then turned without another look and ran towards home as fast as I could go, feeling bashful, elated, sorrowful, all at once.

In my headlong course, I almost ran into Arthur Billings and his wife. They were walking home together, she clinging to his arm in a



half pretence of helping herself around the puddles, and they were both laughing. The spring breeze ruffled her blonde head into little curls about her face, her cheeks were very rosy, and she looked so much happier, so much prettier than a year ago.

"They're very young, too," I thought to myself, "but they knew their own minds—*they* knew they were just made for each other."

Nevertheless, when I drew near home and noted my mother's look of relief to see me alone (she was watching for me at the window) my heart misgave me a little, and I felt a twinge of self-reproach.



## CHAPTER XXXIV.

IT was May, and my twelfth birthday was past. None of my last year's frocks would fit me. There was no doubt in my mind that I was growing up very fast. I had not been writing much poetry during the winter, but I burst into song with the birds in the spring. I wrote two beautiful poems (so I deemed them) to "H. C. J." ; but, after they were finished, I didn't know what to do with them. They couldn't be sent to Laurie to print, for he would certainly not approve—he might even call them nonsense. Of course I couldn't think of letting papa or mamma see them, and I was too bashful to read them to Harry ; so I showed them to Cissy Hankinson. She thought them "just perfect," and insisted on copying them. To this day she keeps that copy, written in a very round hand on pink note-paper with a white dove at the top.

The fact that Cissie, just at that period, was very much interested in Willis Jessup, cemented the bond of our friendship more closely than ever. We scarcely ever quarreled now, only once in a great while, as on the day when Cissie said that Willis was better-looking than Harry.



Of that there could be no doubt, but I felt it my duty to be angry with any one for saying so. Or, another time, when I said that Willis was too young for Cissie (also quite true), but she was not pleased. It is singular how little attraction the plain, unvarnished truth has for most people.

Just at this time Laurie made us a flying visit. I was very much afraid that some one would make some allusion to Harry in my brother's presence. I knew just how quizzically his keen, blue eyes would look at me, and I dreaded being "made fun of" by him. There never was a person in the world, not even my mother, whose good opinion I so longed for as Laurie's. I could be bold in the presence of my parents, but when it came to talking about my friend to Laurie, I knew that would be impossible.

Whether any one told him or not, he did not mention the subject to me. His talk with me was all of books and studies, and of his plan to put me in school near him the coming autumn. I was wild with joy at the prospect. I could have sat all day at his feet and listened. Then he told us of himself, of the difficulties he had encountered in starting his paper, and how, just at the moment when failure was staring him in the face, help came from an unexpected quarter. A rich old gentleman that he had met came to him and offered him a loan, enough to tide him over the worst. The old gentleman said, in explana-



tion of his interest: "I used to know your mother, sir; and a sweet girl she was. You're like her, sir. There's a trick of expression that makes me think of her, but you haven't got her eyes—and her curls, my boy, her curls—well, I've never seen such curls." Laurie imitated the old man's tone (he was a great mimic), and we all looked at my mother, who blushed very prettily. Papa pulled a little wayward curl on her temple. It was quite gray, but he said, "There never *was* anything prettier than that!"

Then Laurie told us how he had at last repaid the loan, and that he had money in the bank and every prospect of prosperity before him. "And now I'm going to educate this little girl to make a woman whom we shall all be proud of. I shall never marry, and whatever I have my sisters shall share." I hung my head, overwhelmed with the brilliance of this prospect and with my brother's generosity. But mamma and papa smiled.

"Young men of twenty-two are very apt to think that they'll die single. Like Benedict, they have to say afterwards, 'When I said I should die a bachelor, I did not think I should live to marry,'" papa said. "But I hope you won't marry yet awhile, my boy."

After a two days' visit, Laurie was gone. I could think and talk of nothing else but his plans for me, although my mother warned me not to



set my heart on it, as they had not fully decided if it would be best. Harry felt a little hurt that I was so happy to go away. When he hinted as much, I was surprised. "Why, Harry," I said, "didn't I *promise*? I can think about you just the same, whether I am in Northport or Chicago, and you'll be going to college yourself pretty soon."

"Three years!" laughed Harry. "Do you call that soon?"

"Well, anyway, there'll be the vacations. I don't s'pose they'll let us write to each other. I'm sure Laurie wouldn't like it."

"No," said my friend, moodily; "grown people don't seem to think boys and girls have any feelings. What'd your brother do if he couldn't write to a girl for years and years?"

"He wouldn't mind," I said, positively. "He doesn't care for anything of that sort. I guess he just thinks it's all silly."

When the schools closed, the summer was at the height of its beauty and perfection. I had grown so much more serious that my mother had ceased to dread my risking my life by falling into the canal, or to fear that I should start on voyages of discovery, but she still thought she had cause for anxiety. Harry and I were almost inseparable. I used to wonder that she did not forbid our going so much together, but afterwards I learned that papa had objected to her



doing so. "Let this calf love run its course," he said. "They'll only be sentimental and sulky if you check them ; and if you don't, time will cure them." However, this new development had the effect of determining my parents to let me go to Laurie in the autumn.

Kitty—a big girl now, with her curls braided tight and a pair of new and very large front teeth—used to have great fun at my expense. She pretended to look under my pillow for love-letters and photographs, and she used to sometimes make believe that she missed a lock of hair from my luxuriant fringe. "Where does the child get such ideas?" asked mamma, aghast. "That Jessup boy is revolutionizing my entire family."

Kitty tossed her braids and looked very knowing. "Jack told me something," she remarked, mysteriously.

I grew crimson, and my ears began to tingle. There wasn't anything for Jack Jessup to tell, but he was quite equal to the composition of a good story, I felt sure.

"What did Jack tell you, dear?" asked mamma in her sweetest tones.

"He says—" Here Kitty broke off and began to giggle ecstatically. "He says—that Harry can't talk enough about Bess when he's awake, and he—O-o-oh ! Stop kicking me, Bess."

"I'm not touching her, mamma," I exclaimed,



indignantly. "I just went to cross my knees and my foot slipped."

"What *does* Jack say, Kitty? Stop giggling, you silly child," pursued mamma, relentlessly.

"He says 'Bessie, Bessie,' all the time in his sleep, and Willis threw his pillow at him the other night, so's he wouldn't talk any more and keep 'em awake, and the pillow hit the water pitcher an' it fell down an' broke, an' Mr. Jessup came running upstairs an' said 'Boys, boys!'" Kitty rolled her eyes and struck a dramatic attitude. "'What's all this fuss about?' An' Willis says 'Bessie Benton,' an' his father didn't know what he meant, an' Harry pitched into Willis an' punched him like everything." Kitty paused for breath, while papa laughed until the tears stood in his eyes.

"What do you suppose Mr. Jessup thought when he found out what they meant, Bessie?" asked my mother; but I was beating a hasty retreat upstairs and pretended not to hear.



## CHAPTER XXXV.

"O BESS, mamma says I can have a lawn party!" Cissie came bursting in upon me as I dusted our parlor. I dropped the duster and caught hold of my friend. We executed a few waltz steps to relieve our feelings, and then sat down.

"How perfectly elegant, Cis'. In the evening? O, I *hope* it's going to be in the evening!"

"Well, I just guess so. I'm in my 'teens now. I don't have to have a *children's* party. We're going to have Chinese lanterns, Bess, and a calcium light on the lawn, and Bryan's band to play—perhaps."

"O, goody! I hope I can have a new dress for it. Perhaps Laurie will send me one. I'm going to write this very day and ask him."

"If I could only make my hair curl; but it never will stay in summer! Don't you know something to fix it, Bess?"

"I don't, Cis'. Might try mucilage."

"Why, yes, maybe that would do. I *do* want to look as well as I can, Bess." Cissie's intonation was almost pathetic. She was not very good to look at, and, strange to say, she seemed to realize it.



Laurence responded to my appeal, and I had the freshest of white muslin frocks, dainty as lace and bows of white ribbon could make it. For days before the party I spent most of my time at the Hankinsons', helping Cissie with the decorations and with stoning raisins and cracking nuts for the construction of toothsome cakes. When there was nothing else to do, we shut ourselves up in her bedroom, away from the tribe of little brothers and sisters, and discussed the prospect. It was a small, low-ceiled room and the two windows were deeply shaded in summer by the branches of a giant apple-tree. We could, by hanging dangerously across the sill, almost reach the green fruit with which the tree was loaded. It was but a plain little apartment, there were no lace frills or satin ribbons, no scent of dainty sachets nor glitter of such cut-glass and silver toys and trifles as beautify the rooms of the young girls of to-day. The old-fashioned bedstead was covered with a patchwork silk quilt of the pattern known as log-cabin. It had once had a frame-work at the head for hanging curtains, but drapery about a bed was considered in those times "too outlandish for anything" and the framework had been taken away. The dressing-table, a fragile piece of Chipendale, but little appreciated in that epoch of hideously cumbrous furniture, was surrounded by mementoes and trophies of all sorts—dried grasses, bird's nests, paper flowers, candy mot-



toes, faded valentines, cheap little flags, tintype pictures of Cissie and her friends at all ages, and in all costumes. There was the brother at a military school, very stiff and dignified in his military jacket, with a perfect eruption of brass buttons, carefully and faithfully gilded in the picture by the tintype artist. Then there was the old great aunt from the country, with a onesided smile playing amid a network of wrinkles and a cap outrageously and rakishly cocked over one ear, wearing her best black silk, very wrinkled about the waist and short enough in front to display two substantial prunella-gaitered feet. Then there was Cissie—a preternaturally fat and solemn baby, Cissie at the age of two, still abnormally fat and quite inclined to cry, Cissie at five, one stocking very much wrinkled on her chubby leg, with a row of stringy curls all about her round head and pantalettes much in evidence. Cissie at the age of eight—hair tightly drawn back from bulbous brow, a countenance of awful solemnity, toes turned in, reading a book, with left hand spread out to show a new birthday ring. Cissie at ten, lovingly entwined with Emma Fantucci and Cora Billings, all laughing, but trying to look serious, a struggle very detrimental to their features. I was there, too, a plump and determined-looking fairy, pointing my wand at the spectator, apparently ferociously bent on impaling some one on its point. Cissie, also in



fairy garb, was next me, feet very conspicuous in white shoes, wand held in military style. These and many others formed a gallery of art such as most of us who were young in the 'Seventies can well recall. At each window stood a low rocker with a cushion stuffed with feathers on the seat, and the floor was covered with an ingrain carpet so faded and worn that its original pattern was scarcely visible. Downstairs the furnishing was more modern. The old pieces, some of them works of art, had gradually drifted into the nursery or the bedrooms of the other children. There was a large fireplace which had been walled up and a register introduced in its place. On one side of the mantel was a cupboard, where my friend kept such treasures as she wanted to lock up out of the way of her enterprising little brothers and sisters. I do not now recall what all of these treasures were, though I remember that there was food for both mind and body inside. Cissie always kept there some nuts and fruit or home-made candy on which we feasted, a pack of cards with which we sometimes played "Casino" or "Old Maid," some paper-bound novels at which I peeped covetously when she opened the door, for I was under bonds to read no more novels without my mother's special permission. No such restrictions were laid on Cissie, and she flourished before my envious eyes such tempting volumes as "Lena Rivers," which she declared



was "perfectly elegant," or "Cometh Up as a Flower," which was "too lovely for anything. I just wept buckets of tears over it!" and she showed me a tear-splashed page which I could not keep my truant eyes from reading.

"The Knight's bones are dust,  
His good sword is rust,  
His soul is with the saints, we trust—"

I murmured. It sounded very strange and attractive.

"Oh, Cis! *Please* tell me the story. I know I should just love it," I pleaded.

"You can take it," said my friend good-naturedly. "Oh, I forgot—what a nuisance that you can't read novels."

"Mamma might just as well let me," I said. "I *think* them all the time—great long ones with the most exciting plots and lots of scrapes for the heroine to get into. But do tell me about it, Cis."

"Let me see," pondered Cissie. "I don't know if I can. I've read so many since. But Dick is the hero's name. I've always wanted to know a Dick ever since, for I just adored him."

"Was he as nice as Willis?" I suggested archly. Such little jokes as these were considered necessary from time to time. It was only polite to "tease" one's friends occasionally with reference to their preferences. It was thought "mean" not to do so.



"Oh—different. He was an Englishman, you know. I just believe I'd love to live in England. They have such good times there. They're always drinking tea—I don't like tea very well—but somehow tea and muffins by the open fire, or tea and cakes out on the lawn sounds so nice. All the nicest novels are about England—not "Lena Rivers," though; that's Southern, like "Uncle Tom's Cabin," only different."

I brightened up a little. "Mamma let me read that. She said it had done the greatest work of any book she knew of—about slavery, you know."

"Yes, but it isn't as nice as this." Cissie patted affectionately a tattered copy of "Rose Mather." "That's all about the war, and it's just heavenly. Perhaps your mother would let you read it if she let you read 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.'"

"I'll ask her. I'm pretty sure she will if it's about the same things. Well, I s'pose I must go," after a little pause, during which I fingered over the book. "Mamma says I just *live* here, now." I jumped up and executed a few dance steps. "Oh, Cis—to-morrow night, to-morrow night!"

"To-morrow night!" echoed my companion joyously, capering about like me and clapping her hands. "Bess, it just seems as if I couldn't *live* till then. Good-bye, you dear old thing—won't I see you to-night?"



"You'd better walk down our way," I suggested. "I'll be out on the front steps. Mamma's afraid your mother won't like it—having me come here all the time."

"Nonsense! but I'll come over any way, and then your mother won't mind your being here to-morrow to help. Oh, I just pray it'll be a pleasant day!"

I walked homeward, variegating my progress with an occasional little skip to express the joyous excitement with which I was overflowing. I should have liked to run and skip all the way, but I thought I was too old to do so. It was nice to be old and have longer frocks, but it also had its responsibilities and inconveniences, and it quite often kept me from doing things that I should have enjoyed. Sometimes, when Kitty had all her dolls out, I felt impelled to sit down on the floor and help her dress them or put them to bed, but, during the past winter, I had stopped playing with dolls because I thought myself too old. I had "burned my bridges behind me" by giving them all to Kitty. It caused me many a pang to note the careless way in which she treated big Eugenie, my wax favorite. Eugenie's cheeks were losing their color—her hair was a tangled mop. I could not but think how many years she would have lasted under my tender care.

The next evening, I was the first guest to arrive at Cissie's party. I had been especially



asked to come early and assist my friend in doing the honors. Cissie was all in blue—a knot of blue ribbon tied in her hair, and around her forehead was a row of neat little curls which looked exactly like watch-springs, so metallic, so fixed were they. I wanted to re-arrange them, but it seemed to me dangerous. I feared they would break off in my hand. “I don’t believe my hair ’ll come out to-night” she whispered to me in triumph. “I put on lots and lots of mucilage.” She had on a pair of new and very tight blue shoes, which kept her constantly uneasy and hopping from one foot to another to give herself some relief, and in one hand she held a big bouquet of garden flowers, in the other a fan and handkerchief. These she constantly shifted and transferred from one hand to another in order to greet her guests,

From the ages of six to fifteen, every one we knew in town was there, and the gay summer dresses showed flower-like amid the green. The lawn was rather unkempt, and the trees grew as they pleased, without the aid or care of a gardener, but, at night with the light of hundreds of Chinese lanterns, it looked very beautiful, and we were very happy.

I was most sinfully proud of my Chicago frock. It had an “air,” I thought, quite different from anything worn by my friends, and I pranced about like a small peacock, admiring myself immensely.



Harry was attentive, but very serious—the effect of new clothes and an extremely high and stiff collar. I was inclined to coquet a little with him, and this made him more and more serious. He looked at me anxiously and failed to rise to my airy sallies. In the pause of a lancers he finally asked me if I were angry with him.

“Who told you that?” I asked, astonished into dropping my Dolly Varden manner.

“Nobody, Only you act so—so sarcastic and queer. I thought maybe you were mad.”

Evidently I was not a success in the Dolly Varden rôle, or Harry was very dull. I tried to think that Harry *was* dull and treated him accordingly until his appealing eyes—they were like the eyes of some honest, well-intentioned setter—made me feel ashamed and sorry. Then I relented and frankly gave him all the dances he asked for, without stopping to pretend I couldn’t remember whether I was engaged or not.

Gradually the lanterns burned out, or burned up, and only here and there a solitary light showed dangling from the big trees. The moon came out and looked down upon us with a friendly face, dimmed at intervals by a filmy fleece of cloud. We had done ample justice to the supper—the younger members of the company had long since gone home—and our feet were weary with much dancing, our eyes heavy with sleep.



On a bench under an old apple-tree we sat silent, Harry and I. I think that both of us felt a little sad ; I know that I did. Why, I could not have told, except that I was tired and the party was over. But, somehow, I felt that something else was ended for me—that a new world was opening before me—an unknown region. I wanted to shake off the strange discomfort.

“I guess we’re all talked out, Bess,” remarked my companion ; “but I like to sit here with you like this, even if we haven’t got anything to say to each other.”

“I’m so tired, Harry, and kind of—blue, I s’pose. Don’t you ever feel like that ?”

“Never—unless something happens. I did at first to-night, when I thought you were mad.”

“I haven’t got anything more to think of,” I said, mournfully. “Now this is over, and mamma said I couldn’t read ‘Rose Mather,’ and there aren’t going to be any more parties or picnics that I know of. If I only had an interesting book !”

“I’ll lend you a splendid one—all about Indians—‘The Pathfinder,’” said Harry, eager to find some consolation for me.

“That’s Cooper, isn’t it ? I don’t like Cooper. I like books that tell about balls, and describe the heroine’s dresses.”

Harry laughed. “Well, you couldn’t expect



*me* to like that kind," he said. "Cooper's just immense."

"O, good gracious, Harry!" I interrupted, springing to my feet, "I do believe everyone is gone but us. The music has stopped, and it's just as *still*."

It was but a short walk along the same street to our house, and papa had left me to go home under Harry's care. We both felt proud of this mark of confidence as we walked along under the alternating shadow and white moonlight, the sound of our footsteps echoing back from the dark and silent houses. It was so still that we whispered as we went. It seemed as though, if we spoke aloud, we should awaken the sleepers within. But in our front windows a light was burning, and on the shade was outlined my mother's profile. She was patiently waiting to see me safe at home and to listen to the stories I should have to tell of the pleasures and triumphs of the evening. The jingling bell pealed harshly through the quiet house—the shadow arose.

"Good-night, Harry," I cried.

"Good-night, Bessie—dear. Pleasant dreams."

\* \* \* \* \*

My mother caught me in her arms and gave me a sudden little hug. I looked up, surprised, into her face. Such demonstrations were not uncommon with her, but this time there seemed something unusual about the caress.



"Why, mamma," I said, wonderingly, "you squeezed me then just as you did when we got lost on the lake."

She drew me into the parlor. "I've been looking over some old letters to-night," she said. Her voice thrilled with something like joy. But when she read the old letters mamma used often to cry. I couldn't understand her mood that night. "Look here, Bessie!" She waved excitedly before my sleepy eyes a paper with a great red seal upon it.

"Don't you see? O, my darling, it's the deed—the deed! The Chicago block is ours now by law; it's always been ours by right. We shan't be poor any more. I've been sitting here as if in a dream. I couldn't believe it at first, but now I know I'm awake. Don't you know what it means to us, child? It means ease; it means a heart free from the dread of to-morrow—it means an end to your father's patient drudging. I'm so happy that I'm out of my mind!"

The tears rolled down her cheeks. For the first time I began to realize what the past three years had meant—what cheerful sacrifices, what skillful management, what cares silently and uncomplainingly borne. I began to cry, too; not for joy as she did, but in sympathy with her mood. Those years had been too happy for me to regret them.

"Let us call your father; it was in one of his



letters to me. I don't see how I could have missed it, when I've looked so many times. No, let us go upstairs and waken him. It will be the happiest wakening he's had for many a day. Go to the foot of the stairs, while I put out the light here below."

I turned my head and silently watched her as she extinguished the lamp. The moon threw a flood of light across the hall at the top of the stairs, and hand in hand we stole softly through the darkness into the radiance above.

THE END.

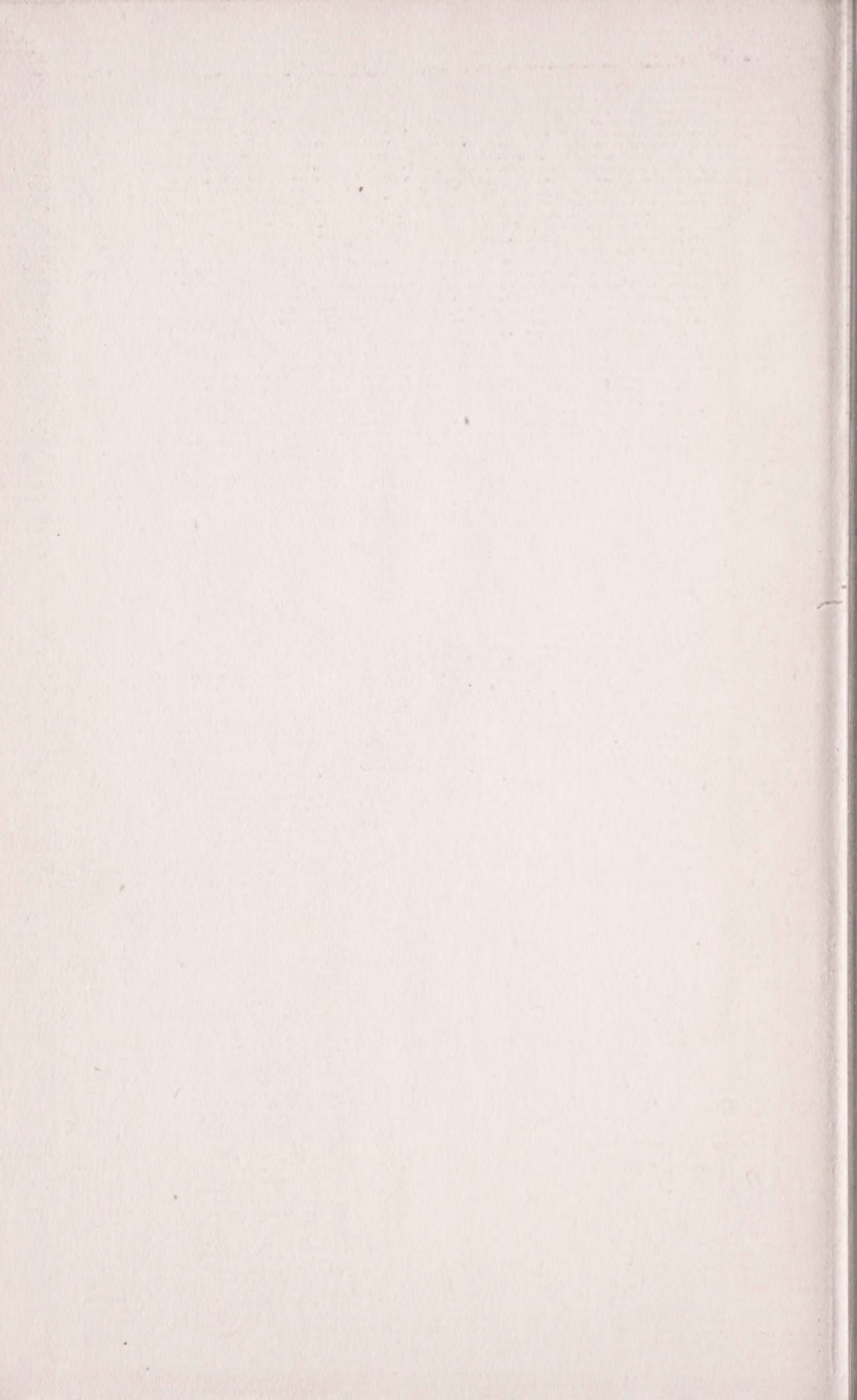


CHAPTER I  
OF THE DISCOVERY OF THE CONTINENT  
AND THE FIRST SETTLEMENTS  
IN THE NORTH AMERICAN  
WILDERNESS  
The first discovery of the continent of North America was made by Christopher Columbus in 1492. He sailed from Spain in search of a westward route to the Indies, and on October 12th he landed on the island of San Salvador in the West Indies. This was the first European landing on the continent of North America. Columbus's discovery led to the European colonization of the Americas, which began in earnest in the early 16th century. The first permanent European settlement in North America was founded by Spanish explorers in 1565 at St. Augustine, Florida. Other early settlements were founded by French, Dutch, and English explorers in the following decades. The settlement of the continent was a long and difficult process, involving many hardships and sacrifices. However, the discovery of the continent and the subsequent settlement of the Americas opened up a new world of opportunity and led to the development of a new continent.















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